THE PELTZER CASE

Gérard Harry

FAMOUS TRIALS SERIES

General Editor: GEORGE DILNOT

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THE BODY AS FOUND AT 159 RUE DE LA LOI.

[*Frontispiece.*

THE PELTZER CASE

by

GÉRARD HARRY

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THE PELTZER CASE

INTRODUCTION

Except, perhaps, for the more recent Dreyfus Affair, no criminal case of the nineteenth century has so profoundly stirred society as that revealed at the Court of Assizes in Brabant, on the 22nd of December, 1882, where sentence of death was passed on the brothers Armand and Léon Peltzer for the wilful murder of Guillaume Bernays.

All the elements that catch the popular imagination and attract the interest of the psychologist were there to be found in a profusion surpassing the boldest flights of fiction. There was the mystery surrounding the tragedy; the incredible cunning of the master brain controlling the preparations and fabricating the false clues that were to exclude all possibility of discovery; the romantic motive; the strange circumstances leading up to the discovery, if not of the whole truth at least of the main truth, at first so baffling to the law; there was the social and even political importance of many involved in this "ténébreuse affaire," as Balzac would

have called it, and the unusual eminence of the magistrates, lawyers and experts brought face to face, formidable for the Prosecution or eloquent for the Defence. No form of excitement was lacking in the Peltzer Case; contemporary society thrilled with horror and anticipation.

For a long time in London and in Paris, as in Brussels and Antwerp, people talked of little else; it was the topic of the hour—the difficulties it presented, the guesswork required to fill in the gaps in the evidence, the fantastic improbability of it all, and the tragedy revealed by the inquiry. So great was the interest that everything else was forgotten.

Speak of the crime to-day to some old man who in his youth witnessed its drama, his dim eyes light up, his heart quickens its beat, and he strains his dull ears to hear again that strange, sinister tale belonging to the far background of his memory, which once stirred him with such varied emotions.

There are still some few who can call to mind snatches of the six or seven crude ballads inspired by the " Crime of the rue de la Loi," the words of which, in French or Flemish, were sung to the forgotten tunes of " T'en souviens-tu," or the " Complainte de Fualdes."

Hidden away among ancient dust-laden records may be found certain lithographic cartoons, picturing the notable episodes of the gruesome story—portraits, photographs and other faded relics of an age which did not know the picture post-card. The files of the Prosecu-

tion and of the Defence are stuffed with anonymous letters, libels against both accusers and accused, rendered almost illegible by time, and caricatures yellow with age. There too is the large official notice, offering a reward of 25,000 francs to anyone who shall deliver up the mysterious Henry Vaughan, or give information leading to his arrest.

There must be some living to-day who were among the idlers that flocked to the Exhibition of Waxworks in the place de la Monnaie, and to the Panopticon of the German, Maurice Castan; who gazed at the masks of the mythical Henry Vaughan moulded on the directions given in the official description, and other less hypothetical likenesses, the faces of the *dramatis personæ*.

In every possible way throughout the long examination public feeling was exploited by the unscrupulous, with shameless disregard for the suffering caused to the friends and relatives of the victim or the accused. Cruel jokes were played. Blameless and respectable citizens were accosted within hearing of a policeman, and rendered liable to arrest, with the words "Voici vos gants."[1] It was not generally known that in the English name the "gh" is not pronounced.

On the day before the beginning of the trial, the police had to request the management of the Panopticon to remove the masks of Armand and Léon Peltzer. These

[1] "Here are your gloves," or "Here is Vaughan!" ("Vaughan" pronounced in French sounds like "Vos gants.")

had been substituted for the face of the imaginary Vaughan, and were being implicitly presented to the crowd as "the murderers," although as yet they were no more than "the accused." For the same reason the publication of a serial, started in a popular paper of the day, *L'Europe*, had to be suppressed. Under the title of "No. 159" (rue de la Loi understood), it was nothing more nor less than a premature and spurious account of the already famous case, as was obvious from the very first chapter, entitled "The Dark Man from Antwerp."

Even the close of the long and moving trial did not put an end to this orgy of scandalmongering. Two days after the verdict and sentence had been pronounced, a tradesman in Cureghem issued a calendar for the year 1883, illustrated with portraits of the condemned and a view of the Court of Assizes, and enriched with a résumé of the principal events of the great case. An anonymous song of insipid sentimentality became popular, supposed to represent the voice of Bernays calling from the other world, and demanding divine vengeance on his murderers. At the same time the authorities had to forbid further performances of "The Tragedy of the rue de la Loi," a horrible lucubration in five acts and six tableaux, which was put on at the ephemeral "Théâtre des Nouveautés," then under the direction of Mario Widmer. The melodramatic rôle of upholsterer was taken by the young actor Ambreville,

who was to become the idolised star of revue and vaudeville.[1]

Every great criminal case arouses a certain amount of morbid curiosity, of which the unscrupulous axe-grinder is quick to take advantage.[2] But there are some, and the Peltzer Case is one, in which, from the highest motives, philosophers, writers and psychologists seek light on the eternal enigmas of the human heart. Is not crime the culminating manifestation of a temperament, the final gesture, revealing the hidden forces of the soul?

Camille Lemonnier and that impetuous poet Emile

[1] In 1884 came a startling echo of the case. Two newspapers, the *Hôtel de Ville* and the *National Belge*, actually began a campaign demanding the revision of the trial. Walls were placarded with notices announcing the discovery in Brussels of the authentic "Murray," the imaginary financier on whose behalf Léon Peltzer declared he had come to Europe to consult Bernays. To silence rumour once and for all, the Public Prosecutor made investigations, only to discover a false Murray, a French ex-officer who had fled to Belgium as a result of indiscretions committed in his own country. A detailed account of this fruitless inquiry was published in the *Moniteur*.

Finally, in 1885, after the death of Armand, there was another revival of interest in the case, evoked by an account of the trial written by James Peltzer, the irreproachable brother of the condemned, trying to prove that there had been a "miscarriage of justice." The argument was concise but one-sided, and extremely uncomplimentary to the intelligence and integrity of the law.

[2] Even political feeling was not excluded from the case—the narrow party politics of the time; for Liberalism did not hesitate to blame the entire Church and the entire Catholic Press for the misdoings of the blackest sheep in the fold; while, on the other hand, the Catholic Press had no hesitation in declaring the Liberal party and Freemasonry directly responsible for the crime committed by one of their well-known leaders.

Verhaeren both took up the pen in protest against the unreasoned malevolence of the crowd, baying like hounds on the track of the accused long before sentence was passed, before ever the twisted story was unravelled.

The celebrated Venetian doctor and criminologist, Cesare Lombroso, made a study of the features, gestures and hand-writing of the two brothers—especially Armand's—adapting them to illustrate his theories on the characteristics of "Criminals of Superior Intelligence."

Paul Bourget, hailed at the beginning of his career as the intellectual heir of Balzac, drew from the tragedy of the rue de la Loi one of the first of his poignant psychological studies, *André Cornélis;* or rather he drew a second drama, to which the first and true one gave him the prelude. He imagines the murder of Bernays to have remained unavenged, the law having failed to discover its perpetrator. The widow of the victim, also ignorant of the truth, marries the man responsible for her husband's death; but, as was actually the case, she has had by her first husband a son who, as he grows up, sets himself secretly and persistently to discover the terrible truth. In the end he succeeds, only to find himself faced with a ghastly alternative. Either he must, in mercy to his mother, allow his father's murderer to go unpunished, secure in the trusting affection of the woman he has deceived, or, in justice to the dead, he must plunge his innocent mother into an abyss of despair and shame. With one or two variations it is the cruel

dilemma of Hamlet brought into the middle classes of the nineteenth century.[1]

In actual fact the Belgian drama of 1881–2 had an epilogue unknown to the general public as to Paul Bourget, but it was not the epilogue that appeared in the moving pages of the French writer.

It is this true story, this unpublished epilogue in all its amazing developments, that I propose to reconstruct here, with an accuracy that only a unique collection of records and the research of many years can ensure.

. . . . . .

In undertaking this double reconstruction, I intend the study to be entirely objective, and shall try to throw as much light as possible on the absorbing psychological problem of a crime entirely free from the usual sordid motives, and graced by sentiments which in other circumstances would have commanded nothing but admiration.

In all times, many criminals brought face to face with justice have invented with belated care a mysterious and elusive individual on whom they lay the responsibility of their crime and its consequences.

[1] Much more recently the French critic Ernest-Charles, in a group of studies on the influence of love in crime, has briefly reconstructed the Peltzer Case. With inadequate information at his disposal, he has, however, only given a superficial and deplorably erroneous idea of the part played by Mme. Bernays. On the other hand, he displays considerable insight in pointing out that the psychology of Léon Peltzer, less negligible and less crude than was generally supposed, would make an interesting study for the novelist.

But in this case the classic and non-existent scapegoat was not only imagined beforehand, but was actually created in flesh and blood, named and clothed and sent out into the world. Such was Henry Vaughan, and no sooner was the murder out than all the bloodhounds of the law were hot-foot on his track. But they never found him, for the moment the crime was committed, this figure, seen, heard, encountered, and well known to so many people, disappeared, vanished into thin air, leaving in his place a certain Léon Peltzer, who bore him no shadow of resemblance; for the black wig, the coloured glasses and the swarthy complexion of the masquerader were no more. That Léon should fall under suspicion seemed almost beyond the bounds of possibility; but even should the worst come to the worst he would still have time and to spare in which to return to America and create for himself a convincing alibi.

. . . . . .

I have said that I possessed in this connection a unique collection of records, as abundant and as poignant as they could well be. They came into my hands at the time when I personally made application for the liberation of Léon Peltzer, after he had been thirty years in the prison of Louvain. The late Jules Lejeune, the venerable lawyer, and subsequently Minister of State, had for long been engaged in a desperate but vain attempt to free him, when in 1911 the other friends of

the Peltzer brothers (Edmond Picard, Eugène Robert and Schoenfeld) set themselves to obtain his liberation from the Minister of Justice, then M. Henri Carton de Wiart. They were warmly supported in their task by M. Marguery, town clerk of Louvain and inspector of the prison. During the long years of Léon's imprisonment, M. Marguery had become interested in the murderer and in the moral evolution he had undergone in the solitude of his cell. He had begun by pitying, but had come to respect, and even to love and admire the prisoner. M. Marguery asked me to support the application personally, and the reasons he gave would have touched a heart of stone. I agreed.

Though my intervention can have had but little to do with the decision which shortly afterwards put an end to the thirty years' captivity, yet Léon Peltzer was convinced that he owed me a debt of gratitude. His numerous letters and the conversations I had with him about his experiences as an exile revealed to me the second drama of his life, infinitely more harrowing than the first.

After relating with the utmost impartiality the story of the crime of the rue de la Loi (many of these incidents are now published for the first time), I propose to give this last phase of the famous case. I may reveal it to-day without wronging the memory of the dead or wounding the susceptibilities of the living.

In the first part of this volume you will find yourself

forced to admit that, if the sentence was a just one, as we are bound to suppose it, fraternal love in its extreme expression may unbalance and undermine a man's conscience as effectively as extreme passion for a woman; and a hundred other deductions and observations of intense human and psychological interest will crowd upon the reader's notice.

The second part of this analysis goes to prove the delusion of those sociologists who imagine themselves merciful when they advocate the abolition of capital punishment. Long and solitary confinement is a far more terrible penalty than the scaffold, particularly for an educated and sensitive spirit; and when liberty at length comes to such a prisoner, it is perhaps more grievous to be borne than captivity itself.

PART I

THE PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I

On the day after Christmas 1872—a grey day, lit up now and then by pale shafts of sunlight—the town of Antwerp was in a state of interested excitement. A wedding was being celebrated. Mlle. Julie Pecher, daughter of Edouard Pecher, the wealthy merchant and Liberal leader, was being married to Guillaume Bernays, a young lawyer of great promise, who had at first been the assistant, and then the partner of M. Victor Auger, president of the Order of French Advocates. In addition to the annuity allowed her by her father, she brought him the prestige of a name as honourable as it was influential. The gracious bride herself was respected for her happy independence of spirit and her candid disdain of gossip, and admired for her lovely tawny hair and her beautiful eyes, radiant with idealism. Yet she was not to escape the evil tongue of slander.

For this marriage of a Jewish lawyer with a lady whose family were, in a broad sense, Christians, a papal dispensation had been necessary. This was no doubt the reason of the coldness with which from the first

Guillaume Bernays' parents had looked upon the match, while Mlle. Pecher's mother countenanced the alliance with no less anxiety. Mothers have sometimes an amazing power of seeing into the future!

The brothers Léon and James Peltzer, directors of a flourishing export business in Antwerp, lent their smiling presence at the wedding ceremony. There was a particular reason for the attentions paid by the young couple to these two guests on this occasion, for it was through them that Guillaume Bernays had been introduced to M. Pecher and the young people had made each other's acquaintance. They were, like Bernays himself, of German descent, and were born in Verviers, also Bernays' native town; upon coming of age they had all three become naturalised Belgians,[1] so that they had a great deal in common.

The young couple, on whom at first everything seemed to smile, were not destined to know happiness for long. The first cloud appeared at the end of the honeymoon trip. On their return from Italy they broke their journey in Paris, where Guillaume paid one or two visits to the Abbé Perdureau, the old curé of Saint Etienne-du-Mont. It was his intention to receive instruction in the Catholic faith so that he might enter

[1] It appears that two branches of the numerous German family of Peltzer had long ago left Germany and established themselves in Verviers. One branch, neither intimately nor remotely connected with the great criminal case, considerably developed the textile industries there, while the other moved from Verviers to Antwerp.

the Church. Now it is interesting to note that before his engagement to Mlle. Pecher, Bernays had been presented as a candidate at a Freemason's lodge, by the lawyer Frédéric Delvaux, where he had been received as " companion," after serving his novitiate. His young wife was deeply hurt by his secession from the Hebrew faith in conjunction with his acceptance of free thought. She might have seen, in his conversion to Christianity, a token of his affection for her ; in his vacillations between faith and free thought, the searchings of a conscience feeling its way to the light. Rightly or wrongly she saw only a mean scheme for self-advancement. Her husband, she thought, was simply trying to extend his legal connection, and to gain friends whose influence might serve his political and social ambitions. She felt that her judgment was indeed justified when Bernays begged her to persuade her father to come to his assistance with practical aid. The constant repetition of this request—it was perhaps sometimes more than a request —had already cast the shadow of trouble over their lives, when a son was born, Endé (Edouard), who was to be the only child of the marriage.

The young mother, who had suffered greatly in giving birth to Endé, announced to her husband that she wished and intended to live apart from him in future ; that she could no longer be more to him than a sister. After this she devoted herself entirely to her child, of whom Bernays also was passionately fond.

At this time (1873) the industrial and financial world of Antwerp was startled by the announcement that the firm of Léon and James Peltzer was suspending payment, and that the directors were to come up for trial on a charge of fraudulent bankruptcy; the irresponsible Léon had embarked upon a venture of a doubtful kind, and this was the result. Guillaume Bernays naturally undertook the defence of his two friends, in which he was assisted by M. Delvaux and M. Auger. Things seemed to be going badly, when the eldest of the Peltzer brothers came upon the scene, the man who held in his hand the destiny of Bernays and his wife.

Armand Peltzer was an uncertificated engineer and a man of business, not always successful, but endowed with intelligence and initiative, added to which he was an accomplished linguist like all his family. In 1870, after his young wife had died in giving birth to his only daughter, Mariette, he emigrated to Buenos Aires, where his brother Robert had been established for some time. There he founded an export business in partnership with his brother-in-law, M. Clazon. The business was doing fairly well when the bankruptcy of the Antwerp firm, with which it was to some extent connected, came as a heavy blow, and it had to go into liquidation. Armand, however, still had a certain amount in reserve, two or three hundred thousand francs, and with this he hurried to Antwerp, hoping to be in time to prevent disgrace falling upon his family. Immediately on leaving

the boat he had a conference with Bernays and M. Delvaux, and succeeded in saving his brothers from the shame of bankruptcy. By sacrificing everything he possessed, and promising to hand over the best part of his future profits, he even succeeded in revoking the charge, though he mortgaged his whole future to do it.

Was it affection for his brothers alone that inspired such noble generosity? There were those who said it was rather a question of pride.

Head of the family, and responsible for the honour of the name, Armand had made up his mind to save at all costs the integrity of the name he held from no mean ancestors (on both his father's and his mother's side), for one had been Prime Minister of Hanover, another burgomaster of Osnabrück, and a third a member of the House of Lords in Prussia. Such zeal for the honour of a house is an admirable thing. Even if it counted for much in Armand's self-sacrifice for his brothers, they would still have owed him their eternal gratitude—Léon in particular, for he was badly compromised. The brothers then separated; Léon left Antwerp for England, where shady commercial transactions soon brought him into disrepute; James set up in Brussels, where he laboured at a humble but honourable trade; and their widowed mother blessed her eldest son, who then took her to live with him and the little Mariette.

In Antwerp Armand was regarded with the greatest respect. Bernays, a man with few personal friends,

became greatly attached to him, took him into his confidence, and consulted him in everything, even discussing with him the literary work in which he was collaborating with his friend the Baron von Arden, officer of the Hussars in the Benrath garrison, near Düsseldorf. Arm in arm they went together to the Masonic Lodge—Armand, a free-thinker like most of his friends, and the eminent Jewish lawyer turned Catholic. In the philosophical debates of his circle Armand made a name as an orator of the first rank. His friends marvelled at the originality of his ideas, and Bernays found in him a faithful friend and sympathetic confidant.

Naturally Bernays invited his friend to his house, where he was made welcome and soon came to spend a great deal of his time. Elegantly dressed, his eyes shadowed with interesting melancholy, and the halo of brotherly sacrifice on his brow, at twenty-seven years of age Armand made an attractive figure, and then there was his little motherless daughter. . . . It was more than enough to kindle the sympathy of the young mother with the hair of flame and the wonderful sea-green eyes, whose days were filled with thoughts of self-sacrifice and charity. Here was a kindred spirit, one who would understand her and whom she could understand. She would try to fill for Mariette the place of the mother whose death Armand had never ceased to mourn; and he would help her to bring up her little son in the chivalrous ideas she so earnestly desired for him. Her

GUILLAUME BERNAYS.

[*Facing p.* 16.

husband, she was convinced, would never help her in this; he wanted to teach the child, so she believed, that there are only two things worth having in this world, money and power, and that only by thinking of your own interests before everything else can you procure them both with certainty.

Before long a sweet and happy friendship grew up between the young disillusioned wife and the unselfish and noble young man who had ruined himself for his brothers' sake.

Mme. Bernays delighted in looking after Mariette, and petted her till old Mme. Peltzer, the grandmother, became jealous. Mme. Bernays supervised the domestic arrangements of Armand, the lonely widower, and he in turn was attentive in his thoughtfulness for her and Endé. They made a charming picture in the winter evenings, in the circle of the lamplight, together giving the delightful small child his lesson. Julie Bernays herself would read through some arid treatise on physical science so that she might be able to teach it to Endé. Often when their children were playing together they would look on smiling, like brother and sister, and a charming look of confidence would pass from one to the other. The situation was reminiscent of Charlotte and Werther in the early days, when their happiness was as innocent as the joy of the children around them. It seemed at that moment as if everything might indeed turn out as it did in Goethe's novel; and should Armand

one day wake to find thoughts in his heart that might never be uttered, he would accept from Julie with trembling but unstained hands the fatal weapon, and end in one swift moment his guilty passion and his life. Armand belonged to the country of Werther, the old romantic Germany of the "little blue flower," and there he had lived during the greater part of his studies at a time when youth beyond the Rhine still took Werther as their model.

Bernays looked on calmly, and approved. What more natural than his attitude? What harm should he suspect? The dear friend they had asked into their home had sometimes been the means of bringing husband and wife together after a misunderstanding. More than once his kindly and persuasive tact had averted storms about to break. Had there been evil intent at the back of Armand's mind surely he would rather have tried to embitter their quarrels.

Sometimes Guillaume had to go away for a few days, and then he would insist that the adopted brother should come and fill his place at table. "He is lonely, Julie, don't let us desert him!" Strange words from one who was reputed a brutal and surly husband! Sometimes Mme. Bernays had to journey to Chaudfontaine, Kreuznach, Spa or Ostend for a change of air, for her own health or for the sake of her little son, and Armand, sometimes accompanied by Mariette, sometimes alone, used to visit her almost as often as her husband. Even

when she was ill, suffering from nervous hysteria, he would go to her side. Bernays trusted him unquestioningly. When Julie was away she used to write to her husband almost affectionately, giving him all the news of little Endé, and sending practical advice with regard to the housekeeping. Her letters showed perfect self-possession, and a conscience whose clear depths no shameful thought could sully. Perhaps in his heart of hearts the platonic husband hid the hope that one day Armand's conciliating influence might bring back to him again the woman who bore his name.

CHAPTER II

Meanwhile there were rumours that Bernays was not above consoling himself with a pretty and obliging servant-maid or some other woman, and that Armand sometimes acted as go-between in his affairs.

It was about this time that the domestic servants began to put the worst construction on the perfectly innocent daily occurrences that happened before their eyes. Certain low-bred minds imagine that in slandering their betters they give proof of their own superiority. It is a true saying that no man is a hero to his valet; that, but for a few rare and beautiful exceptions—and I know some—no lady is virtuous in the eyes of her cook. The coolness between husband and wife and the continual presence of Armand in the house did nothing to destroy these loathsome suspicions.

Later on one of the domestics cynically declared that it often pays to be in a house where master and mistress disagree: you can tell tales of the wife to the husband, and slander the husband to the wife, and warm yourself at the fire you have kindled. For some reason the servants, who were mostly from German Switzerland, had made up their minds that there was more than

friendship between Mme. Bernays and Armand. Once they got this idea into their heads they moved heaven and earth to prove it, and contrived a regular system of espionage; the kitchen and servants' hall became a den of conspiracy. Madame usually received Peltzer in a small sitting-room on the first floor which it was difficult to keep under observation; the servants therefore arranged to turn out the furniture and so oblige the suspects to sit in the room downstairs, where they could be watched in comfort. One of the servants had a small child, and they used to send him up to look through the keyhole: he would see all there was to be seen, and tell the others.

The most serious charge brought up by these tireless and contemptible spies was this: a Flemish servant declared that she had seen Mme. Bernays tying her friend's tie, or pinning a flower in his buttonhole, she could not tell exactly which, and whispering (she thought these were the words, but was not quite sure) "My Angel."

This was the evidence on which the evil-minded plotters built up the charge of misconduct!

At this time Mme. Bernays began to complain to her father of strange happenings, intended, she declared, to drive her mad. All night weird sounds were heard in her bedroom, doors slammed when no one was there, inexplicable goings and comings, the echo of prowling footsteps and other uncanny noises threatened to deprive

her of her sleep and reason. Meanwhile several anonymous letters of warning were received by Guillaume, who simply tore them up and soon forgot about them. His confidence in his friend's loyalty and his wife's virtue remained unshaken. "She is a true sister of mercy," he said of her once, not without a hint of bitterness in his tone, "she is too fond of humanity to give her love to one man—even to her husband—far less to anyone else."

The family of three had now lived in harmony for more than four years, during the last of which Armand had again brought peace between husband and wife, when at first they had been considering the question of divorce. After this it would indeed have been ingratitude to listen to the insults of anonymous scandal.

Bernays judged rightly that his wife was beyond suspicion of reproach, but it was perhaps too much to ask Peltzer to continue indefinitely a friendship of such a kind. His soul—perhaps he did not know it—was already on fire.

CHAPTER III

The friendship of Bernays and Armand was not seriously threatened until its eighth year, just before the middle of September 1881.

On the evening of the 11th a party of four were dining together, M. and Mme. Bernays, their inseparable friend, and Endé (then eight years old), when a dispute arose between husband and wife. Speaking of his wife's mother and father Guillaume exclaimed to his son: "I can't bear them; you can tell them that I never want to set foot in their house again." Next day these words were repeated to M. and Mme. Pecher. Naturally they were extremely hurt, and grieved for the further suffering their daughter would have to endure, and they determined to persuade her to bring divorce proceedings against her husband.

Two days later the servants were warned that they would be called to witness on behalf of Madame, and at once made up their minds to side with the master. One of them, Amélie Pfister, a native of German Switzerland, undertook to inform him of her suspicions, aroused when they were in Spa, of the relations between Armand Peltzer and Mme. Bernays.

Bernays heard her story, and suddenly, half convinced

that he had been deceived, was shaken with ungovernable anger. As they were going into dinner, Armand appeared as usual: "Not to-night, you can't come here to-night," shouted Guillaume in tones admitting of no reply; "I shall come and see you to-morrow."

Next day (the 15th) at six o'clock in the morning Bernays kept his promise, and, terribly upset, walked into Armand's house with a revolver in his hand. His friend took the weapon from him, and after a stormy explanation sent him away reassured and absolutely satisfied. Armand had called God to witness the infamy of Amélie's allegations and the innocence of his affections for Mme. Bernays.

For two days after this Armand took his usual place at table. Further provocation was needed to unleash the tempest and prelude the terrible tragedy known as the Peltzer Case. The provocation was not long in coming, and forty-eight hours later the storm burst like a thunderclap.

On the evening of the 17th, Mme. Bernays overheard a conversation between two servants which revealed to her in the crudest terms the slander of which she was the object. Furious and horrified she could not sleep that night, and next day she burst into her husband's study, demanding that the slanderer should be sent away that very instant. Guillaume hesitated and tried to temporise: in the interests of Julie herself it was essential to avoid all scandal. Mme. Bernays could

hardly find words to express her scorn and disgust for a man who would hesitate to protect his wife from insults of such a kind. Going upstairs to her room she sent at once for the Swiss governess, ordered her to return to Switzerland immediately, and, having paid her wages, boxed her ears by way of farewell.

After packing her trunk the governess managed to get hold of Bernays for a few minutes, and did her best to convince him that his wife was simply getting rid of her because she knew too much. She then supplied him with further details of his wife's supposed disloyalty, and promised to write more fully when she had time. At the station, as her train was about to start, Bernays arrived, and giving her some money to supplement her wages made her repeat her promise to complete her revelations by letter. His wife's denials had no longer the power to reassure him.

He came home in time for dinner. Armand appeared as usual. Guillaume's nerves were stretched to breaking: he asked his guest to leave the house, and said he would give his reasons later.

Next day he sent the following letter:

"ARMAND,

"I am obliged to come to a painful but inevitable decision.

"You know of the persecution and the slander that led to our having a private talk together. You asked me to make inquiries and I refused. Proof

has been put in my way, forced upon me, and the horror of what I have had to hear has left me without the heart to discuss it further.

" Whatever the truth may be, in face of this chain of facts my duty is to safeguard the honour of my name and of the woman who bears it. As your presence in my house has been the cause of scandal, insulting to my wife and dishonouring to myself, I ask you not to come back.

" I do not wish to act as judge in my own cause, I have not the courage: I am simply protecting myself for the future against the malice of the world, and assuring, if nothing else, my own peace of mind. In future my wife and I will live only for our son. You too are fortunate enough to have a child: I hope she will be happy, and that our children will never need to share in the sorrows of their parents.

" I ask you, Armand, not to answer this letter. I am too shaken, too unnerved to read or listen to anything you can say on this sad subject.

" It is hard for me, believe it, to break an old friendship—my only friendship—but you realise no less than I that it must be so, for the sake of your own loyalty, for the honour of my good name, and for the peace of all concerned.

" I say farewell without meaningless phrases. . . ."

What a heart-broken cry!

Armand did not take the letter to mean an irrevocable break. The tone was not formal, and Bernays was ready to admit that his friend might be innocent, although asking him to go out of his life. He declared that he did not wish to act as judge in his own cause; therefore he did not definitely accept the charge of his wife's

infidelity. He simply wanted to do away with the suspicion Armand's too-frequent visits had awakened, to silence the humiliating insinuations of a malevolent world.

Armand did not lose all hope of future reconciliation, but for the time being he held himself aloof, and from M. and Mme. Pecher, who never for a moment suspected him, he heard news of all that happened. For things were happening.

M. and Mme. Pecher, incensed at the suspicion with which their daughter was regarded, urged her to claim divorce without delay, on the grounds that she had been insulted by an infamous attack upon her honour. Mme. Bernays, at first of one mind with them, hesitated at the thought of the unhappy position of her child, should his parents become finally separated. Her husband too was influenced by this thought, and by the fear of the more material disadvantage Endé might suffer through the dissolution of his parents' marriage; for at this time feeling against divorce was so strong in Antwerp that even a distinguished member of the Bar had reason to dread its consequences, and Bernays was determined, at all costs, to assure the future of his little son.

At this point another way out of the difficulty was suggested by an eminent friend of the family, M. de Longé, the President of the Court of Appeal. When first consulted, he had suggested simply divorce by mutual consent, thus avoiding all possibility of scandal, but later, convinced of Julie Bernays' innocence,

and even of Armand's good faith, he proposed a *modus vivendi* which was accepted; husband and wife declared that "in the interest of their child they wished to settle their difference peaceably"; Bernays expressed his regret at having credited a baseless accusation against his wife, and acknowledged that it was without foundation, and they returned to their old way of living in the same house.

At the time when Bernays signed this agreement, M. de Longé advised him, unprofessionally, to ask Armand back again into his home life, as a kind of protest, for all to see, against the revolting slander of which he too had been a victim.

"We must wait until time has healed the pain," answered Bernays with a sigh. The reply was purely for the sake of courtesy, for this son of Germany, like all his race deeply imbued with respect for authority, confessed that in the presence of the President of the Court of Appeal, he was intimidated, "like a sub-lieutenant before his general." Privately Bernays had firmly made up his mind never again to open his door to his former friend. Six days after the signature of the *modus vivendi* he intimated his decision, when on the 13th of October M. de Longé returned to the subject of reconciliation with Armand, and invited them both to dinner by way of a start.

"I have agreed," he wrote, "to accept all the conditions except that of meeting Peltzer again. Julie

must not ask what is beyond my power to give, nor demand the impossible. It does not matter to other people whether I see or do not see M. Peltzer, and my reasons are my own concern. As long as Julie is in my house, at my side, no one will have the right to suspect her—no one will suspect her. It is not, therefore, necessary for me to inflict upon myself the society of M. Peltzer. It would only lead to further quarrels."

Even yet Armand would not allow himself to give up hope. He considered, or pretended to consider as a definite undertaking Bernays' vague half-promise to M. de Longé, "We must wait until time has healed the pain," and on the 15th he broke the silence with the following ultimatum.

"GUILLAUME,

"I hear that you have given M. de Longé a formal promise to take back the words of the letter you sent me on the 18th of September last.

"After honouring me with a visit at six o'clock in the morning on the 15th of September, when you expressed your sincere regrets for what had occurred, and assured me as you left my house of your friendship; after repeating your regrets and assurances on Thursday and on Friday evenings, I cannot understand why you then found it necessary so rudely to sever our friendship on no other grounds than the same contemptible gossip that twenty-four hours before you had decided to ignore.

"Had I listened only to the voice of my wounded dignity, I should have demanded from you another reparation, and I should have given you no warning.

I might thus avenge myself personally of your insult, but my vengeance would serve to strengthen in the eyes of the world the suspicion cast on Mme. Bernays' character by your odious suggestions. Only my respect for her and for her family have stayed my hand.

" I even went further: strong in the knowledge of the friendship that lay behind us, of your past confidence in me, of the many times I had helped you with advice and with my moral support, and in my anxiety for reconciliation, I suggested through my brother James that we should meet, and that I should give you a frank and candid explanation. You refused, and set the seal on your first insult.

" I have made up my mind to forget all that as I have forgotten the rest. To make it easier for you to carry out your promise to M. de Longé, I beg to inform you that I consent to become your friend again, at any rate in the eyes of the world.

" For the sake of Mme. Bernays, whom I honour and admire; for the sake of the gratitude my daughter owes her, and to avoid giving a semblance of truth to the lying accusations that have been vilely thrown at her; in the interest of your son, of whom I am sincerely fond, I consent to give you my hand, and to meet you in public as often as circumstances require.

" I shall have done what I can to save the name of a pure woman from the slander of an infamous conspiracy. . . . You have held your only friend very cheap. . . . After our meetings of the 15th and 16th of September I would have wiped out the memory of your unworthy suspicions; your letter of the 18th I can never forget."

How would Bernays take this astonishing epistle,

whose writer assumed an attitude of injured innocence, by turns grieved, austere and magnanimous, nobly consenting to accept a friendship that had already been refused, while declaring himself unforgettably insulted? The lawyer took absolutely no notice of it. It was returned unopened to the sender with the one word "Refused."

This new insult rankled in Armand's mind. He persuaded his brothers James and Robert (the latter just returned from Buenos Aires) to demand in their own names an explanation from Bernays: he himself could do no more without appearing to compromise the innocent wife. The interview resulted in a deadlock. Bernays assured them that he had never wished to insult his former friend, and did not doubt his integrity, but at the same time firmly refused ever to see him again.

The friends had now definitely become bitter enemies, and Mme. Bernays was deeply wounded, for she interpreted her husband's treatment of Armand as a new proof that he did not trust her. On the 18th of October she refused to be present at the wedding of her sister-in-law, Mlle. Bernays, and wrote to her husband's parents giving her reason. She would not appear on Bernays' arm as the erring wife pardoned by the magnanimity of her husband.

Armand then made a final attempt at reconciliation. He remembered that one day Bernays had asked him to procure the French Parliamentary Report on the

Excesses and Tyrannies of the Paris Commune in 1871, a book required for his historical work. At considerable expense Armand got hold of a copy, and sent it, through a mutual friend, to the historian. Bernays refused the gift. He would be under no obligation to his enemy. The gulf had become unbridgeable.

Bernays became silent and gloomy. Husband and wife no longer spoke to one another. He collected all the papers relating to his domestic troubles and deposited them with his partner, M. Auger, to whom he reiterated his intention never to see Armand again, and added: "Words cannot describe my contempt and loathing for that man."

LÉON PELTZER
(Henry Vaughan).

LÉON PELTZER
at the time of the crime.

LÉON PELTZER
in his old age.

[*Facing p.* 32.

CHAPTER IV

Behind the scene the *deus ex machinâ* of the sinister tragedy was already moving.

On the 1st of November a tall fair-haired traveller had embarked on the *Arizona* at New York, giving his name as Adolphe Prélat. It was Léon, the younger brother of Armand Peltzer.

Compelled to leave Manchester after a second financial disaster due to his own rashness or unscrupulous dealings, he had fled to the Argentine, where he had gone into partnership with his brother Robert in Buenos Aires. Having ruined his brother's reputation by yet further indiscretions, he had again been forced to take flight. In New York, where he had lived under the assumed name of Frédéric Albert, he had been overtaken by remorse, and resolved to lead a new life in the hope that one day he might be able to assume his own name again. He had then laboured for three years at the unpretentious trade of traveller in linen goods, humbly but so conscientiously that his employers had come to consider him as a model of industry, perseverance and honesty. Armand, the only one of the family except his mother who had not cast him off, still wrote

to him, sometimes sending material help as well as advice, and it was largely through him that Léon had been able to recover his position as an honest man. This debt of gratitude had been heavily increased when Armand, by nearly ruining himself, had saved his brother from the fate awaiting him in a bankrupt's prison.

In September 1881, after Bernays had finally broken with his hitherto inseparable friend, Armand had sent his brother a letter and then a cable hinting that there might be a chance of repaying this debt if he would make a short voyage to Europe, and suggesting a rendezvous in Paris. It may be that the contents of the letter and cable had caused the black sheep of the Peltzer family some feelings of apprehension, for he had made no attempt to conceal his uneasiness from his employers when he had informed them at the end of October that he was leaving New York for Canada " to fulfil a sacred duty towards a dear friend."

But without further anticipating the development of this memorable tragedy let us return to Antwerp.

No word passed between Bernays and Armand. They did not meet again, and it seemed as though all was at an end between them for ever. Weeks passed in this way, when one day, early in December, the lawyer received a letter from Hamburg, written in English and signed Henry Vaughan.

Henry Vaughan? Apparently a complete stranger who knew of Bernays only by hearsay, for he had mis-

spelled the name "Berneys." He wrote briefly as follows:

> "Friends in London have recommended you to me on account of your legal knowledge in commercial and mercantile affairs. Entrusted with the launching of an important business in connection with overseas trade, I beg that you will do me the favour of replying to the list of questions enclosed with regard to Belgian regulations for foreign limited companies, and of accepting as honorarium the enclosed cheque of five hundred francs."

Gratified by the proposal, and without the slightest misgiving, Bernays replied by return of post, and on the 14th of December, Henry Vaughan wrote again, stating that after a short stay in Bremen he was proceeding to Brussels, and would then ask for a further consultation.

Eight days later, on the 22nd of December, another note from Vaughan, sent from the Hôtel Britannique at Brussels, also in English, and still addressed to "Berneys":

> "I am returning to London to-morrow, via Antwerp. I shall spend a short time in your town, and shall have the honour of waiting on you."

And next day this telegram:

> "My child ill and taken suddenly worse, must return to London direct. Will see you later."

Twelve days passed and no word from Vaughan. Then, on the 4th of January, 1882, he wrote to Bernays that, pressed by business and tied by many engagements, he found it impossible to visit Antwerp for the proposed interview. Nevertheless the business was urgent: the capital for the future company for interoceanic trade (£50,000 stg.) had already been subscribed, and a local committee was to be called at Antwerp, for which it was necessary to consult "Berneys" without delay; could not the lawyer himself make the journey from Antwerp to Brussels, where Vaughan had just rented a house at 159 rue de la Loi, quite close to the station where Bernays would arrive? The unknown client added that he would place his carriage at the disposal of the lawyer in case he should care to take advantage of his visit to Brussels to attend to other business there.

For a lawyer to visit a client, especially a client whom he has never seen, is against all legal etiquette, but Vaughan gave such good reasons for this disregard of custom that his correspondent in Antwerp replied at once:

> "Certainly I will come and see you on Saturday, 7th January, preferably in the afternoon, unless I take the morning train arriving at 10.50 a.m."

Vaughan replied by return:

> "Many thanks for your kind letter. Saturday suits me excellently, but I should be very grateful

if you could come, as you suggest, by the train arriving at 10.50."

On Saturday morning, after accompanying his son Endé to school, Bernays left by train.

Did he pause to think over the unusual circumstances of the interview? He remarked to a fellow-passenger: "I have no idea whether I am going to meet a peer of the realm or a commercial adventurer." The evening before, speaking of his domestic troubles to his clerk, he had said: "What more will they do to me?—they are capable of anything," and an hour later he had written a letter in the same melancholy strain to his friend and collaborator, the Baron von Arden. The letter was mainly about the *History of the Rhenian Confederation* which he was compiling, and for which Arden had written the preface, but Bernays also touched on the trouble in his home. He mentioned his interview with the wealthy Englishman who was perhaps to make his fortune, but confessed his secret longing to withdraw from the world, and with the help of his venerable friend, the Abbé Perdureau, to live, forgotten by everybody, as a missionary in some far-off country, "where he might be devoured by cannibals or carried off by the yellow fever." To the same friend he had declared not long before that he had an enemy "whose very name he could not mention without shuddering."

Do these fears and misgivings tell of the forebodings of a man warned by some mysterious instinct that in

leaving Brussels that 7th of January he had started on his way to keep tryst with Death? Is it a remarkable example of the subconscious mind piercing the veil that hangs over the future? or can we discern the relentless hand of destiny leading Bernays towards a hideous fate, which he, vaguely suspecting, might even yet escape if he would only listen to the half-heard voice that whispers "Beware"?

His fate was to come upon him with overwhelming swiftness. Henry Vaughan, watching for his arrival from behind the curtains of the house in the rue de la Loi, ran downstairs to open the door. In three minutes Bernays was dead. A shot aimed at the back of his head had shattered his skull where he stood.

CHAPTER V

For eleven days no one but the murderers knew of the lawyer's terrible end.

Before leaving Antwerp in the morning Bernays had told one of the servants (he no longer spoke to his wife) that he would return late in the afternoon.

At eleven o'clock that night Julie began to get anxious about his prolonged absence. She ordered a servant to take the chain off the front door, thinking that her husband was no doubt dining with his parents in Brussels and would return by the last train. She went to bed but could not sleep, and at two o'clock she rose and woke the servants to inquire if " Monsieur " had yet returned. When she heard that he had not she became very agitated. She feared that her husband might have been seized with a sudden fit of insanity ; there had been, it was said, two cases of the kind in the family. At this a servant, without saying anything, hastily went and put the chain back on the door, " terrified that a madman would walk in."

When morning came (the 8th) there was still no sign of Bernays. Endé was told to send a telegram to M. and Mme. Bernays senior : " Did father visit you yester-

day?" The answer was not long in coming. He had not been there.

Mme. Bernays consulted her parents and various friends, among whom were the lawyers MM. Delvaux and Auger, and Armand Peltzer himself. Every possibility was discussed: loss of memory, accident, suicide, or perhaps he had gone off with some woman, or suddenly decided to visit his friend the Abbé Perdureau in Paris. This last theory was suddenly strengthened by the arrival on the 10th of a letter from the Baron von Arden. In answer to Bernays' despairing cry, his friend exhorted him to have courage and patience, and to give up entertaining morbid ideas of death among cannibals and fever. A wire was sent to the abbé. He knew nothing.

Should the police be informed? Several of Mme. Bernays' friends, and especially M. Delvaux, thought that they should wait another twenty-four hours before doing so. There was no use making a scandal when there might be a perfectly natural, or perhaps a none too creditable explanation of the absence. Meanwhile they decided to seek the key to the mystery in the drawers of the study desk, and with the assistance of Mme. Bernays they made a hasty search. Bernays' papers were found in an unaccustomed disorder. They removed certain securities and other papers of a private nature, not knowing who might have to go through the desk later on.

But Vaughan's letters and telegrams? They were

there, or should have been there, and would at once put the searchers on the right track by revealing the fatal rendezvous on the 7th, at 159 rue de la Loi.

They were there, but in the confusion of the moment they passed unnoticed. On the 19th there was no difficulty in finding them after the first inkling of the truth had come to light; but then they told nothing that was not already known.

The Public Prosecutor and the Chief of the Police in Antwerp were informed on the 11th of January. They began at once to make inquiries, and Bernays' disappearance was reported in the papers. From that moment some of his former servants and his confidential clerk Van der Voort became suspicious, fearing that the lawyer had fallen victim to foul play, in some way connected with the quarrel with Armand.

But Armand's whole attitude gave the lie to such a suggestion. He showed not the faintest sign of embarrassment. On the 5th of January, two days before Bernays' disappearance, he had given a lecture to the Association of Engineers in Antwerp, on the Paris Exhibition of Electricity visited in November in company with his wife's brother-in-law, De Roubaix-Pecher, and his full, clear and well-informed discourse had astonished the ablest men among his audience. The disappearance of Bernays appeared to affect him deeply, and he declared himself ready to forget and forgive the great wrong he had suffered. All his actions and

gestures showed perfect tranquillity of mind and conscience. Once or twice he journeyed to Liège to discuss an important scheme for coal transport on the Meuse. For some time a rich banker in Antwerp, a friend of Armand's, M. Lemmé, had been recommending him as director of this concern, and a syndicate of well-known business men [1] had read with admiration his remarkable report on the proposed undertaking. In his visits to Liège he discussed the question with such intelligence, knowledge of his subject, and clear-sightedness that the syndicate decided to entrust him with the execution of his suggested ideas. They at once acceded to his request that he should continue to live in Antwerp, the home of his aged mother, where his daughter was being educated, and where he had so many of his friends.

What suspicion could stand against such proofs of peace of mind and apparent innocence?

About this time there occurred a strangely disturbing phenomenon which has never been revealed to the public until now, and which was related to me long years after it happened by Mme. Charles de Rongé. This wealthy and generous lady was one of the first Belgian women to be decorated by Leopold II (for her philanthropic works: she erected model dwellings for working men at the Clabecq iron

[1] Amongst whom were such men as the Baron Sadoine, director of the Cockerill Works, the Senator Julien d'Andrimont, M. Jules Dupret, director of the Val-Saint-Lambert Works, and M. Habets, professor of the Liège University.

works, left to her by her husband). Mme. de Rongé was an old friend of M. and Mme. Bernays (senior); and when their son Guillaume was at Brussels University she had taken a great interest in him, and often entertained him in her house.

On the 13th of January then, six days after the disappearance of her son, Mme. Bernays had come to see Mme. de Rongé, and with streaming eyes had told her of the terrible thing she had dreamt. She thought that her Guillaume had been murdered by a long-dreaded enemy, and the corpse had been buried in a piece of waste land in the rue de la Loi. Obviously the law could not be expected to do anything on such unsatisfactory indication as a nightmare, but could not Mme. de Rongé's nephew, who was Solicitor-General, use his authority to have the land privately searched? Mme. de Rongé and her nephew, sympathising with the bereaved mother's wish, did what they could: the waste land seen in the dream was unofficially dug over, naturally without result.

But the dead body of Bernays was lying only a few yards from the place, in the solitude of an abandoned house. . . .

Not until six days after the warning dream, that is, on the 19th of January, was the corpse found where it lay. What chance or what chain of brilliant deduction led to the discovery? It was a letter, addressed to "the Coroner of Antwerp," dated the 16th of January, from Bâle, written in English, and signed Henry Vaughan.

It began thus:

> "I was shocked and horrified to read in this morning's paper a paragraph asking for news of M. G. Berneys. I at once realised that, after leaving behind in my house a first letter, the second which I sent to the coroner at Brussels must have gone astray, and that the horrible accident which took place at 159 rue de la Loi has not been discovered. By this terrible misfortune a second calamity has now been added to the first."

He then stated that Berneys' death had been caused by an accident which happened on the 7th of January. Vaughan had been showing him a revolver, which had somehow gone off and killed the lawyer, and he, a foreigner, aghast at what had happened, had lost his head and run away. He was then taking his wife and child to the South of France for a change of air, but would return as soon as possible, and place himself in the hands of the law. And he finished the letter:

> "As I want this letter to go by the next post, I cannot say more, but must send these lines as they are. Nevertheless I hope that whilst mourning the untimely death of the deceased, and condoling with his family, some sympathy will be spared for me also. I too, though in a lesser degree, have been sorely tried."

That it was the letter of an authentic Englishman, and that he had only recently become acquainted with Bernays in business, seemed impossible to doubt. Even

the name was wrongly spelt; and who but an Englishman could have written a letter so English in its style, and addressed it to the "coroner," an official who has no equivalent in Belgian or French legislature?

M. Berré, the Public Prosecutor in Antwerp, sent Vaughan's letter to M. Delvaux so that he might communicate at once with Mme. Bernays. Meanwhile he wired to his colleague in Brussels that no time should be lost in entering the house at 159 rue de la Loi.

Then there happened something that the most daring dramatist would hesitate to put on the stage, lest he should be accused of wild improbability. M. Delvaux's time was occupied with other urgent matters, and he commissioned Armand himself to show the letter to Mme. Bernays, and to inform Julie of the tragic widowhood he was afterwards accused of bringing about.

Then it was that the wife of the victim exclaimed, "But I know that writing, I saw it eight days ago in my husband's desk!" The drawers were again searched, and at once delivered up the correspondence.

The young widow was obliged to go to Brussels to identify the body of her husband in the rue de la Loi; and after this ordeal she went to see her father-in-law in the rue de Montoyer, but without a word he shut the door in her face. When she returned home on the evening of the 19th, exhausted with the horror of all she had been through, Armand himself, together with her parents and a few friends, came round to do what they

could to help and comfort her. Armand actually accompanied M. and Mme. Pecher to their daughter's house, so far were they from suspecting him. Did a shadow of the truth flit across the mind of the beautiful widow? Alone with Armand, except for the presence of M. Delvaux, she suddenly besought him to swear that he knew neither personally nor by reputation the mysterious Henry Vaughan. Armand was indignant. What a question! Was she crazy? She must be mad! His protests seemed so unquestionably sincere that both M. Delvaux and Mme. Bernays were completely reassured.

So much so that next day it was Armand who, at his own suggestion, undertook to send a wire to a friend in London, accepting her offer to come and be with Julie in this time of sorrow and anxiety. And when, after a long and detailed post-mortem, the body was brought back to Antwerp for burial, it was Armand who walked at the head of the procession following the ghastly remains to the cemetery; and he appeared more deeply moved than any.

His friends who were in the confidence of M. Berré, the Public Prosecutor, kept him informed of the progress of the inquiry, without appearing to notice the whisper that was already incriminating the eldest brother of the Peltzer family in the tragedy: was it not to his advantage that Mme. Bernays should become a widow?

CHAPTER VI

Armand also kept himself in touch with every movement of the law in Brussels through his brother James. James, who was never brought into Court, as he never had the slightest inkling of the truth, kept his brother minutely informed, thinking, naturally, that his interest in the tragedy was due to his long intimacy with Bernays. So on the 19th of January, the day of the forced entry into the deserted house, James might have been seen, his eyes and ears open for information, outside the police station, and later, standing before the scene of the drama: he then wired to Armand that the authorities were inclined to the theory of an accident.

In which he was only half right. The Public Prosecutor in Brussels, M. Willemaers, and the examining magistrate, M. Ketels, accompanied by Mme. Bernays and a police officer, had entered the house with the help of a locksmith. They had explored it from attic to cellar, and had found several pieces of evidence in confirmation of the account in Henry Vaughan's letter.

First they had come upon the corpse, stretched out in an arm-chair in the study, as though asleep. Traces of blood were found on his moustache and on the carpeted

floor. A gas lamp was still burning—eleven days after—forgotten in the confusion of flight. Then scattered about the place were a number of visiting cards, some inscribed Henry Vaughan, and others bearing the names of various lawyers in Bremen and Hamburg. Finally, proving that the mysterious Englishman was indeed, as he declared, a respectable married man, a gold wedding ring, engraved with the names "Henry and Lucy 1871," was found lying by the lavatory basin. No doubt the tenant of the deserted house had removed it to wash his hands of the blood of his guest.

The letter to the "coroner" mentioned in the letter from Bâle was actually found. It told the same story of accidental death, and announced that the involuntary and distracted murderer would come and give himself up on the following Tuesday (the 10th). In the meantime he enclosed the key of the house which would enable the "coroner" to enter.

Then, in the middle of the room, a small arsenal of revolvers (seven) laid out on the writing desk, and yet more visiting cards belonging to Henry Vaughan. Too many cards perhaps, and too little furniture. Had there been some ugly work here after all? Was the story of the accident perhaps a blind? Indeed the furnishing was very sketchy. Only the windows in the front of the house had curtains: only the room in which Bernays was received had been furnished, and a little

room on the second floor where Henry Vaughan had spent the night before the interview. Was it perhaps only a setting, simply stage scenery brought together for a trap?

For some days the inquest fluctuated between the two theories.

It was not hard to find traces of Vaughan in Brussels. Since his first appearance at the Hôtel Britannique in December he seemed to have scattered clues with almost unnecessary lavishness, as though to stamp on people's minds his identity as an English business man. Dark-haired, dark-skinned, and wearing coloured glasses, he had carried his arm in a sling, so that at the hotel he was able to dictate instead of writing the information required by the civil regulations. Then he began his rounds. He went to the stationer's to order visiting cards, to the upholsterer, the locksmith, the linen-draper, and the furniture shop, and then from a certain M. Almeyn he rented the house in rue de la Loi, paying down the usual deposit. His was evidently not a retiring nature; he went everywhere, seemed almost to want to advertise himself.

However, one or two details that would have delighted the heart of Sherlock Holmes attracted the attention of the magistrate, M. Ketels. In the sleeve of a vest Vaughan had left behind in the house, and in the comb found in the small bedroom, a few fair hairs had been discovered, whereas everyone who had met him unanimously declared

Vaughan's hair to be black. Was it possible that they were dealing with a criminal disguised by a wig and a clever make-up ?

This " Englishman " who wrote, and spoke, officially, only English had been heard by several people talking Spanish, and once, Flemish. Then again, had he not carefully removed all buttons and tell-tale tabs from the clothes he left behind, and which were later found to have been bought in Paris ? And finally, nothing came of the promise to return to Brussels and give himself up, and no trace had been found of him in Bâle.

Circulars, notices and paragraphs to the Press were sent out, giving a description of Henry Vaughan—for want of a better—and specimens of his handwriting photographed from the letter to the coroner ; and a reward of 25,000 francs was offered for information of his whereabouts. Such an offer was so unusual that it was severely criticised at the time, as an encouragement to false information, and an insult to the morality of honest citizens. Surely the cause of justice could be maintained without bribery. As a matter of fact the only result of the promised reward was a deluge of letters, all anonymous, and therefore worthless.

By February the people of Antwerp were beginning to have a suspicion of the truth.

If Armand was the only person interested in the death of Bernays, and if Henry Vaughan was the false name of a false Englishman, with false hair, a false husband

and paterfamilias, what more likely than that he should be the real Léon Peltzer, the happy-go-lucky bachelor, the wanderer on the face of the earth? He might easily have come over from America disguised, on purpose to do the job for his brother, the brother who had been so good to him in the past that now he could refuse him nothing, not even this.

Invisible hands began to write in chalk on the walls in Antwerp, like a prophetic *Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, the audacious words "Cherchez Armand! Cherchez Léon!"

Investigations in America were continued, and meanwhile Armand, always impassive, was placed under supervision. One day, on the 9th February, the magistrate, M. Ketels, requested him to hold himself in readiness for examination at his house in Antwerp.

Instead of a stricken culprit, the magistrate found himself in the presence of a man of perfect dignity and self-possession. On the subject of his relations with Mme. Bernays, Armand gave account of himself as any gentleman would: ready to die rather than that a word should fall from his lips which might compromise a lady whom he honoured as greatly as he loved her. He had taken care, he said, not to see her since her husband's funeral, so that there should be no opportunity for spiteful gossip.

"But up till the 8th or 9th of January did you not, by means of your servants, exchange letters, and now and then small parcels?"

"Letters, yes, M. le Juge. For some time Mme. Anspach-Pecher, a sister of Mme. Bernays, has been dangerously ill in Mentone. Every day news is wired from there to M. and Mme. Pecher: several friends, of whom I am one, have asked to be informed of these reports. I send, or rather used to send, them on to Mme. Bernays, by arrangement with her family, who live a considerable distance from her house. You can verify all this. As for the parcels, they contained nothing but presents of sweetmeats from Mme. Bernays to my little daughter, to whom she has been like a second mother"; and furtively he brushed aside a tear. The good judge was touched by his distress.

Informed of the suspicion resting on Léon, Armand swore by the head of his little Mariette that his brother was far away in America, and not content with that, he produced several convincing proofs.

(1) The carbon copy of a letter written by him (Armand) on the 27th of September, asking his younger brother to write at once and give an account of his doings.

(2) Léon's reply from St. Louis (Missouri), dated the 18th of December, and received in Antwerp on the 6th of January, telling a tale of further failure and disgrace, and announcing his imminent departure for California and on to the Far West.

(3) A copy of a telegram from Armand to his brother James in Brussels, dated the 6th of January: "Received

bad news from L., come this evening, will show you his letter."

(4) A copy of a letter he had written that same day to Henrich Krauss (Léon's new pseudonym) at the poste restante in San Francisco, reproaching him bitterly for his failure to make good, and begging him to keep straight in future.

Léon's letter of the 18th of December from St. Louis was particularly impressive. If the suspect was so far away on that date, how could he, humanly speaking, be at the same time in Brussels, writing to Bernays under the name of Vaughan, from the Hôtel Britannique? There was no transatlantic air service in those days.

"Have you the envelope belonging to the letter from St. Louis, M. Peltzer?"

"No, M. le Juge, I have destroyed it, as I always destroy envelopes; only the contents are of value."

"It is a great pity."

"Yes, but who is going to doubt that this letter is genuine, or refuse to take my word for it? Could I foresee the disastrous death of Guillaume Bernays, and the outrageous insinuations which would drive me to the necessity of proving with the help of an envelope that my brother is as innocent of this calamity as the President of the United States?"

The magistrate was very nearly convinced, but nevertheless he pursued the inquiry on the following day, the 10th of February, dealing particularly with Armand's financial

position, and the resources at the disposal of the younger brother. Still he did not find a single fact to justify the rumours that cast suspicion on both the Peltzer brothers.

There is no doubt about it, thought M. Ketels, this man is entirely innocent—or else, which begins to seem extremely improbable, he is the cleverest and most consummate actor that the world has ever seen.

CHAPTER VII

Nevertheless, outside the Courts public feeling against Léon was gaining in strength.

One of the thousands of photographic copies of Vaughan's writing then being circulated had come the way of a chemist in Verviers, who declared that he recognised it as the hand of Léon Peltzer, with whom he had once done business. And the public, ignorant of the secret activity of the law, began to grumble at the apparent negligence or blindness of authority.

On the 20th of February, M. Ketels, in view of the Verviers chemist's statement, made up his mind to take a decisive step and issue a warrant for the arrest of Léon Peltzer. He also tried to precipitate the search in America by an exchange of cables with the authorities over there, and one of the first results of his inquiry was the discovery of the last known address of Henrich Krauss (alias Léon Peltzer) at the poste restante in San Francisco. Here was found Armand's long homily to his younger brother, the copy of which he had shown to the judge. It is true that this homily might have been written afterwards to furnish very valuable evidence, like the first letter of the 27th of September, the copy

of which might well have been made in the expectation of a possible inquiry. No doubt it had been accompanied by a private note saying: "Take no notice of this request, it is intended for other eyes, but come at once to Europe, for I who have done so much for you need your assistance now. Bernays is making himself unbearably objectionable, and I think you can help me to settle him."

This is more or less what had actually happened. But nothing in Armand's manner betrayed him to his questioners as he stood before them on that February day in 1882, proud, calm, and self-composed. Who could have imagined him capable of such diabolical scheming, or could have suspected the cunning that had prompted the wire of the 6th of January to James, designed to deceive his brother, and thus gain a witness firmly convinced of the truth of Léon's alibi?

Had the judge at that moment suggested that it was all a fantastic invention, planned to convince the prosecution of the prisoner's innocence, who would have believed such a fairy tale?

Light was not to break until twelve days later, on the 5th of March, through the sudden unforeseen and startling intervention of a doctor of medicine in Brussels, Dr. Remy Lavisé, who had been a great friend of Armand's since his return from the Argentine.

Suspected, watched and finally questioned by the Court, Armand had gone to see Dr. Lavisé in Brussels and tell him of the atrocious position he was in. He then

asked him, as a favour, to act for him as messenger in a correspondence with a lady whom he did not wish to compromise, at this time when all his comings and goings were so unjustifiably watched. At first it was simply a question of going to the Gare du Nord to fetch a letter which awaited Armand there. The chivalrous Lavisé, himself indignant at the horrible accusations whispered against his " innocent friend," did not hesitate to render this service, and to receive or send off several other letters of the same kind.

Then on Sunday, the 26th of February, ten days after the warrant had been issued against Léon, an extraordinary scene occurred—a scene hitherto known only to those intimately concerned in it.

On that evening the good doctor invited to dinner, as a protest against the rumour that was going about, his friend Armand Peltzer and his brother James, to meet several well-known men of the day, amongst whom were Maurice Kufferath, political editor of the *Indépendance Belge*, and Léon Dommartin (Jean d'Ardenne), the witty part-editor of the *Chronique*.[1]

All the guests were assembled except Armand, who was expected from Antwerp. He arrived after a short delay. And then James, his brother, as much in the dark as the doctor himself, rose and said jokingly: " I have the honour of presenting to you the Murderer ! ' The sinister jest was received in cold silence. Armand

[1] It is from these two that I have my story.

grew pale, and frowned. All evening the usually gay and witty company seemed uncomfortable and depressed.

Much worse was to come after the guests had taken their leave. Alone with her husband, Mme. Lavisé could no longer restrain herself. After his brother's unlucky attempt at humour, she had noticed Armand grow pale, and had observed him furtively during the conversation at dinner, and gradually conviction forced itself upon her that she was looking on the face of a man obsessed with some secret fear, a man who might indeed have been implicated in the tragedy of the rue de la Loi. She remembered the clandestine correspondence her husband had helped him to carry on, and she entreated the doctor for the sake of his own peace of mind, and for the sake of his children, to see no more of this disquieting friend. She even asked him to consider whether it was not his duty to inform the Public Prosecutor of the correspondence with the unknown "lady," lest one of these days he should find himself accused of complicity.

Dr. Lavisé declined. His faith in Armand, and even in Léon, was still unshaken. He explained Armand's troubled expression by the iniquitous accusations that had been brought against Léon, and his anxiety for his brother's speedy return from America to clear himself: all his chivalrous instincts revolted from the idea of betraying the confidence of a friend in misfortune. After a night passed in argument and entreaty, all that

Mme. Lavisé had gained was a promise that her husband would no longer act as messenger for Armand.

Four days later (on the 2nd of March), the doctor sorely regretted having made even this concession to his wife's fears, when the following protest appeared in the Antwerp papers. At the earnest request of several friends, amongst whom was M. Delvaux, Armand had addressed to the Press a letter, which his brother James had also signed.

" To the Editor.

" The newspapers have reported the issue of a warrant against our brother, Léon Peltzer.

" We will not attempt to discuss this judicial measure which so nearly affects us, but we would ask you to notice that on the 14th of February last we wrote to our brother informing him of the rumours that were going about, and begging him to return to Europe with all speed. Our letter was sent to San Francisco, the address given by our brother when he last wrote from St. Louis on the 18th of December, and was submitted to the Public Prosecutor, who saw to its dispatch.

" We are convinced that our brother will return as soon as he hears of the murder of Guillaume Bernays, and of the ghastly suspicion that has fallen upon him, and which his return will at once silence. Meanwhile we await with tranquillity the result of investigations, confident in the justice of our country.

" To the suspicions of the vulgar and foul-mouthed crowd, whose object it is not difficult to discern, we have nothing to say. May God grant that in the day of reckoning their consciences may be as untroubled as ours are now."

This indignant protest silenced for a while the " vulgar and foul-mouthed crowd."

And Dr. Lavisé was completely reassured. Next day, the 3rd of March, Armand asked him if he would fetch another " billet doux " from the poste restante, and he reluctantly refused on account of his promise to his wife, but on Sunday, the 4th, at about ten o'clock in the evening, his friend returned and begged him so urgently to take a last message—a telegram—that he yielded, and went with Armand to the telegraph office.

He returned home again with no suspicion of the thunderbolt that was about to fall. He was sitting in his study when, towards one o'clock, he was startled by a violent ring at the bell. He ran to the window, and looked out into the darkness of the street. Standing below was Armand, asking him to throw down the key, as he had something important to tell. The doctor complied and went down to meet his nocturnal visitor.

" Can I trust you ? " gasped Armand, as they reached the first landing.

" Naturally, but what's the matter ? " asked M. Lavisé.

Armand accompanied him into the study, his face as white as paper.

" A ghastly thing has happened," he whispered, " a catastrophe—Léon has misunderstood my wire. He will be here in a few hours—4.38 at the Gare du Nord—will you have him here ? "

Imagine the horror and stupefaction of the doctor. So the " fair lady " with whom he had unwittingly helped his friend to correspond was none other than Léon! Armand gave him no time to express his thoughts, but repeated again and again, " Will you have him here ? "

" No, no," cried Lavisé without hesitation, " certainly not."

" What am I to do then ? " groaned his friend.

" Go to the station yourself and stop Léon from coming here."

Armand left the house like a madman, having given his friend a terrible shock. The unsuspecting doctor did not yet understand what had happened. He supposed that Léon, on hearing of the tragedy and its consequences, must have come straight back to prove his innocence. Yes, but then why did Armand look on his arrival as disaster ? What was at the bottom of this mystery ?

Lavisé woke up his wife and told her what had happened. She was less surprised but even more horrified than he. What abominable plot was this that her husband had got himself mixed up in ? Surely he would no longer hesitate to inform the authorities ?

But the doctor still drew back. Were not the claims of friendship, the trust of his friend, more binding even than family ties or social obligations ? His generous heart was torn between conflicting duties. At length,

to put an end to the torturing mental conflict, he decided to make a compromise: at daybreak he would go round and call up some of his legal friends, honourable and distinguished men, such as the great lawyer Paul Janson, Eugène Robert [1] and Frick, and lay before them a problem of duty such as Corneille might have conceived. If they advised him to say nothing, how gladly would he keep silence: if they told him he must speak, with death at his heart he would speak. They did; and at eight o'clock on the morning of the 5th he presented himself before the Public Prosecutor, and related everything that had occurred. Before he went away he was made to promise that he would tell no one of the revelation he had just made until further orders. This promise was to cost him dearly on the morrow.

Next day old Mme. Peltzer came to see him. For some time she had been living in Brussels, where she had a room at the Hôtel Mengelle, and knowing that Dr. Lavisé was a great friend of her son's, she had come to ask him for news. She had had no word for forty-eight hours. Actually he had been arrested the previous night at his house in Antwerp, and secretly conveyed to the prison of Petit Carmes in Brussels. The doctor knew of this, but was bound to silence. Unable to break the news gently, to console the *mater dolorosa*, and make her understand the dreadful necessity that had

[1] It was Eugène Robert, curiously enough, who afterwards defended Léon in the trial.

driven him to denounce her son, he could only answer with a lie: "I know nothing."

The following day Mme. Peltzer was still ignorant of her son's fate. She had not seen the papers, full of allusions to "the sensational development shortly to be disclosed," and again she called on Dr. Lavisé to ask for news of her son.

This time the doctor was allowed to prepare her for the shock that was coming to her. He went about this task with all the delicacy at his command. Mme. Peltzer heard him with wide staring eyes. At the end she knew everything, except that Armand had already been arrested. Falling to the ground she writhed in paroxysms of despair. When she rose, tears were streaming down her cheeks, and she cried aloud:

"My sons, my two sons, both murderers!—and all for that woman, that woman who has always done her best to take Armand from me! My sons, murderers! He will have taken advantage of Léon's weakness. Oh, why am I alive to hear of it?"

In spite of all Lavisé could do, she left him in despair. Hardly had she descended to the street when the supreme blow was dealt her, which would no doubt have been fatal but for the doctor's revelations, which seemed in a measure to have stunned her. Outside, newsboys were pushing past in their haste to sell the special edition that the crowd was eagerly seizing from their hands. They shouted "Arrest of Armand Peltzer!"

Meanwhile, Léon was not to be found. Where had he hidden himself since daybreak on the 6th of March, when he arrived at the Gare du Nord ?

Armand, who was ignorant of Dr. Lavisé's revelation, when questioned in prison persisted that his brother was in America, and even drew from his pocket the carefully guarded letter of the 18th of December, from St. Louis, confirming the alibi.

On the 7th and 8th of March he protested against the cruelty of these interminable questions to a sick man,[1] but he repeated his statement with conviction. His brother was still on the other side of the Atlantic. On the afternoon of the 9th he was still firm on this point.

But then the blow fell.

" Really ? " said the examining magistrate, " so Léon is in America ? Well, turn round and look over there."

A shudder passed through Armand's frame, and his eyes clouded with fear :

" Where ? " he murmured.

The two small rooms set apart in the prison for examination of prisoners were separated by a kind of grill. On the other side of the grill stood Léon. Two nights before, Police Officer De Keyser had arrested him in a train leaving Cologne station for Austria.

[1] As a matter of fact he had literally gone to pieces since his arrest. He had begged for another twenty-four hours of liberty so that he might at least safeguard the interests of his beloved little daughter Mariette ; but his request was not granted.

ARMAND PELTZER.

[*Facing p.* 64.

With an almost superhuman effort, Armand assumed the attitude most likely to affirm his innocence.

"What! Vaughan was Léon in disguise! Oh! you wretch!"

The younger brother bowed his head before this taunt, and whispered:

"My poor brother!"

But after this dramatic meeting the inquiry took a new direction.

Armand was at last informed of Dr. Lavisé's revelations, and could no longer deny his knowledge of his brother's presence in Europe, at any rate since the "accident" at 159 rue de la Loi. Moreover, his secret meeting with his brother at the Hôtel du Commerce in Paris on the occasion of the Exhibition of Electricity in November had been discovered. He then changed his tack and produced a new and at first sight perfectly plausible version of affairs.

"Léon had come to Europe on behalf of a certain financier, Henry Murray, to make preliminary investigations in Belgium, Germany, Holland and England with a view to founding a shipping company. On account of his unfortunate past history he had had to change his name at each stage of the journey. In Paris he had stayed at the Hôtel du Nord in rue de la Fayette, calling himself Louis Marie, and had then moved, under the name of Jules Kérouan, to the Hôtel du Commerce, where he had taken two communicating rooms, as he

was expecting a visit from Murray. It was there that I met him. He wanted to consult me about the navigation business, and after careful consideration I strongly advised him to involve himself no further in an enterprise which did not appear to me to be sound, and in which I feared his incompetence, his rashness and his weak character might lead him into serious difficulties. At my urgent request he finally agreed to break with Murray and return to America straight away. This was at our third interview.

"I went back to Antwerp, confident that he would keep his promise, and when I heard no further word from him, I made sure that he had gone. It was at this point that Bernays disappeared on the 7th of January. No shadow of suspicion crossed my mind as I helped his family to make a search. On the 8th I was dumbfounded by a message from Léon, summoning me to a midnight interview at Maestricht. He told me everything: how after I had left Paris in November he had again seen Murray, who had persuaded him to go back on his promise to me: how he had been obliged to consult some expert on the subject of the company and had thought of Bernays, the most distinguished of all: how on account of my quarrel with Bernays, of which I had told him, he had imagined it necessary to disguise himself as Henry Vaughan before approaching the lawyer to ask for advice, and finally he told me how he had arranged an interview at 159 rue de la Loi, where

the fatal accident had occurred, and how, distracted by what he had done, he had fled to Germany.

" I was horrified by his story, and at first I advised him to expiate his involuntary crime by doing away with himself. I then considered the possibility of his giving himself up in Brussels, and making a frank confession of what had occurred; but when I realised that no one acquainted with my brother's unlucky past would ever believe his story of accidental homicide, I shrank from this solution. In the end I urged him to flee as far as he could. But then I thought of the body of my old friend lying there unburied perhaps indefinitely, and his family left in agonising uncertainty as to his fate, and I decided I must see Léon again. I met him at the Gare de Liège, and dictated to him a letter, addressed to the coroner, so that before his return to America the authorities should be put in possession of the facts, and informed of the place where the remains were to be found.

" It is true indeed that I invented part of the correspondence with Léon, hoping to create for him an unquestionable alibi, but who will blame me for that? I was trying to save my brother from a terrible fate, and my name, by association, from an intolerable stigma. I was then an accomplice. I would have done more than that for my brother's sake. I appeal to the generous feelings of every chivalrous man."

Interrogated separately Léon said nothing to contradict

his eldest brother's words. Their respective stories tallied astonishingly: they had foreseen every contingency. Never for a moment contemplating failure, they had none the less faced the possibility of their both being arrested, and had planned this fiction which would reduce to a minimum Léon's guilt and completely absolve Armand, whose only crime would appear to have been his endeavour at all costs to save his younger brother from the consequences of his action.

Who had supplied the money, about 15,000 francs, necessary for Léon's journeys from America to France, and thence to Belgium, Holland, England and Germany, for his hotel expenses, his disguises, the many telegrams in code, the renting and furnishing of 159 rue de la Loi? Certainly not Léon himself, so poor on the eve of his departure from the United States that he had had to borrow three dollars to send a cable of two words to his brother. The words of the cable: "Robert Fulton," according to him meant "I am quite well"; according to the judge they signified "I obey, I am coming."

Armand was able to prove beyond possibility of doubt that he had not financed the expedition, for no sign of extra expenditure had been discovered in the books and papers dealing with his meagre income.

"It was Murray who supplied the money," declared Léon, "Murray who was cowardly enough to desert me after the catastrophe in rue de la Loi, and I can prove it. From the 7th of January, the date of the accident, until

the 7th of March I had plenty of time to get back to America unsuspected, and, if necessary, to prove by my letter of the 18th of December that I had never left the New World; but I could not, for Murray had cut off supplies."

CHAPTER VIII

Unknown to the accused, the inquiry was proceeding from discovery to discovery.

In Brussels, Hamburg, London and America numerous indications of a secret understanding between the two brothers were to be found. These were chiefly telegrams or letters in code, signed with borrowed names, but traced without much difficulty to the two accomplices. Amongst them was a telegram from Léon (signed Marie S.) to "Astor," at the poste restante in Antwerp, and it was found that Armand had had visiting cards made in the name of Astor expressly to enable him to claim the message in question. Certainly the prisoners could always deny the magistrate's interpretation of their secret language, and they did not fail to do so to the end. The magistrate, for example, explained an urgent request for papers telegraphed from Léon to his brother as a distressed appeal for the money indispensable to his flight. It was certainly guesswork, which might perhaps seem unwarrantable, for the key of the code between the two brothers was never discovered.

But proofs of a much more reliable kind presented themselves. There was a terribly compromising letter

sent to Armand on the 11th of January by his brother Robert (the one in Buenos Aires), containing this passage:

"Armand, my dear Armand, pull yourself together! For the sake of everything you hold dear, banish from your thoughts the phantom of this woman, and be a man again. Your health is giving way, and your very mind is no longer what it used to be; before long you will become one of those aimless creatures who drag their weary bones to the grave! Pull yourself together!"

The meaning of this advice was only too clear. It was recalled how Armand had begged his brothers Robert, then on a visit to Europe, and James to interview Bernays on his behalf. Robert must even then have realised the despair in which exile from Mme. Bernays had plunged his brother, and no doubt Armand in his subsequent letters had expressed his depressed state and his distaste for life, to which Robert had replied with the words, "Pull yourself together, Armand, and banish from your thoughts the phantom of this woman."

Then remember the involuntary cry of Mme. Peltzer at the house of Dr. Lavisé: "My sons, both murderers, and all for that woman!" Does it not amount to an avowal from the lips of his own nearest relations of the crime of an exiled lover?

Other proofs, no less eloquent, had come to the knowledge of the magistrate.

On Christmas Eve, a fortnight before the death of Bernays, Armand had in his own house tested the noise

of the report made by his revolver, a weapon intended to deal with tramps, according to his explanation. Now the inquest had proved that at this time Léon, after purchasing several Gaupillat cartridges in Paris, tested and bought in London the revolver that was to kill Bernays with a single shot and with the minimum of noise. It was a sumptuous little breech-loading pistol *de luxe;* and then in the cesspool of Armand's house there had just been discovered a parcel of Gaupillat cartridges, which had been thrown there after the crime.

Further, not long before his arrest Armand procured, through an agent, a yellow leather trunk which had since completely vanished. When questioned he replied:

"It has nothing to do with this case. It was confided to me by a certain person to deliver to another. I do not even know what it contained. I am bound to silence on the subject by an oath nothing can induce me to break."

There was undoubtedly terrible evidence hidden away in that trunk which was never to be found.

Equally elusive was the famous Murray, of whom Léon could only give the vaguest description. He had met him, it appeared, in a saloon bar out in the Far West, and had caused him to lose some 2,000,000 francs in a worthless speculation. In spite of this the wealthy financier had sufficient confidence in him to entrust to him the founding of a company with a capital of half a million

sterling, of which, moreover, not a single subscriber was ever found. Léon could neither give Murray's address nor produce a single specimen of the voluminous correspondence he declared had been exchanged between his patron and himself. Apparently they had only met in the hotels and cafés of New York, Liverpool, Manchester and Paris. Was it possible that anyone could take Murray seriously?

Then there came the report of the experts on Bernays' death. Death could not possibly have been accidental. The wound could only have been inflicted by a revolver fired deliberately about eight inches from the back of the head. But by whom? Undoubtedly by Léon, since he did not deny the material fact. And the brother in the background, had he nothing to do with it? Someone, at any rate, must have let himself into the house some hours after the murderer had fled, to pick up the body and place it in the arm-chair in an attitude which would corroborate Léon's story. Otherwise, why was the gas lamp left alight—to guide the steps of a nocturnal visitor? And how explain that singular impression of a foot in the blood-stained carpet, evidently made several hours after the "accident" by someone who had come to alter the position of the body?

The pseudo Henry Vaughan, informed of some of these discoveries, realised that all was up with the fiction of the "accident," and asked for permission to "refresh his memory" in peace. On the 4th of April he pre-

sented the examining magistrate with a statement which can be summarised as follows:

"I had shown Bernays into my study, where I was going to discuss with him the Interoceanic Navigation Company. He suddenly stared at me and exclaimed:

"'But I know you, I know you!'

"I was very embarrassed and turned away my head. He then saw that I was wearing a wig, and tore it off:

"'I thought so; it's you, Léon! Léon Peltzer!' he shouted at me, furious. Using the most violent language, he threatened to denounce me for having, under a false name and in disguise, tricked him into entering my house. His insults and threats made me lose my head. Mechanically I seized from my table the first weapon I laid my hands on, to defend myself or to frighten him, I can't say which. I do not yet know how the pistol went off and brought Bernays crashing to the ground. Filled with consternation I did my best to revive him by sprinkling him with water and ammonia, but it was no use. Almost mad with terror I placed the body in a chair and wrote the letter to the coroner, which I left behind me in my flight. I fled: you know the rest. As for the impression found in the blood on the carpet, it was made by my knee when I bent over the victim in my efforts to restore him to life."

This was to be Léon's final statement. It is plain that all through he was trying to exculpate his brother

at his own expense: not another admission would he make to the judges, and neither could they wrest from Armand anything more than his declaration, reiterated times without number: "I had nothing to do with the tragedy. I knew nothing of it until my conversation with Léon at Maestricht on the 8th of January, and I am in no way concerned in it, except by my subsequent efforts to secure my brother's safety." Once more, Armand stepped into the hero's part, and again he appeared to have sacrificed everything and fatally compromised himself for the sake of Léon.

What did Mme. Bernays and her friends think of this? Later M. Delvaux was to divulge a conversation he had had with the widow when he informed her of the arrest of Armand. Till then, M. Delvaux had had absolute faith in the virtue of Mme. Bernays, a faith arising from admiration and an affection which he had honourably concealed since her marriage. But like everyone else he had been forced to draw certain deductions since the arrest of Armand, and a doubt had awakened in his mind which gave him no peace. When, therefore, he took the news of the arrest to the widow of the murdered man, he led up to the subject with some hesitation, and finally besought her to tell him in confidence whether guilty relations had actually existed between her and the accused—this Armand who seemed to have deceived them all.

She reassured him with such sincerity that he had no

further doubts on that point, but he then became anxious about something else.

" Then," he said, " I am afraid."

" I too," murmured Mme. Bernays.

These brief words were to be very variously understood, yet their meaning is quite clear.

M. Delvaux meant, " Armand is not your lover, so it is to be feared that in order to become so, or to be at liberty to marry you, he has actually killed Guillaume, or had him killed."

" That, alas! is what I fear too," whispered the widow of the lovely eyes and hair, echoing his words with her own: " I, too, am afraid."

But all the same M. Delvaux went away relieved of a great burden: he was more absolutely convinced than ever, and rightly, of the purity of the young widow, to whom, moreover, he was to offer a striking tribute of respect and confidence before the Court of Assize.

By an unexpected gesture Armand himself helped to defend the reputation of Mme. Bernays—the second mother of his little Mariette—from slander. After he had been in prison for several weeks, he one day declared that it was the anniversary of the death of his wife, buried at Verviers, and he insistently demanded of the prison directors that flowers should be laid on his behalf on the grave of one who, though dead, was for ever beloved, and " without a rival in his heart." According to the prosecution this was " propaganda," propaganda

intended to create the belief that the instigator of the murder had never loved another than his dead wife, and therefore that the supposed motive of the crime did not exist. Perhaps. But who can read the ins and outs of a human heart, or declare that the wish to acquit his dear friend, unjustly suspected, had not a great part in this tribute to the dead? Perhaps too there was something of regret for the memory of his dead wife, offered at a time when the name she had borne was being dragged through the mire.

PART II

THE TRIAL

CHAPTER IX

More than ten months passed before the lengthy preliminaries were completed, and it was not until Monday, the 27th of November, 1882, that the trial began at last.

This decisive phase of the affair was preceded by an amazing incident, little known to the general public at the time, and certainly unprecedented.

A week before the opening day of the trial, the examining magistrate, M. Ketels, called together in his office the editors of all the daily papers, and addressed them in the following commendable words: "I have no doubt that professional interest drives you all to desperate efforts to be the first to get hold of the text of the indictment—the corner-stone in this case which is thrilling the public curiosity at the moment. It is on this subject that I have to make a solemn appeal to your consciences. The charge is so overwhelming to the accused, who, until sentence is passed, have the right to be considered as innocent, that they will be condemned by public

opinion without hesitation. People are already too well informed, and if the charge is known too long before there is an opportunity of hearing the other side of the question, they will inevitably form their own judgment on the case. The publication of the indictment would thus create an atmosphere hostile to the accused, and might unconsciously influence the impartiality of the jury.

" I know, on the other hand, with what gross material difficulties you will have to contend next Monday, if you have hastily to set up the type of such a voluminous charge. I therefore propose this: on condition that each one of you gives me his word of honour to publish nothing before Monday afternoon, that is to say, before the entire document has been read in the Court, I shall now hand you each a copy from which you can prepare your reports of the opening of the trial at your leisure. In this way, if no one is first with the news, no one will be behind the others, and the interests of the Defence will be safeguarded."

The editors consented unanimously, and departed, armed with the precious papers, and resolved faithfully to abide by their word.

Imagine their feelings when, on Saturday the 25th, two days before the meeting of the Court of Assize, the newsboys in Brussels were heard crying the *Journal des Tribunaux*, " with the complete report of the charge brought against the Peltzer brothers " !

Angrily they expostulated with M. Ketels, who explained that he had not summoned a delegate from the *Journal des Tribunaux*, and bound him to silence like the others, first, because that yellow weekly had never before attempted to rival the dailies in the province of news, and particularly because the said organ was founded and edited by M. Edmond Picard, and other Counsel engaged in the Defence. Naturally he had assumed that they, if anyone, would be interested in keeping back the knowledge of the damning accusation. Upon this there ensued a short but bitter Press dispute in which the *Journal des Tribunaux* declared that the accused had been consulted, and had given their full consent to the premature publication. But what induced them to sanction an act which might have the effect of weakening their case? The Counsel for the Defence may possibly have seen in this premature publicity a stroke of generalship. It was a method of saying: "We consider these charges so futile, so utterly lacking in foundation, that we are not afraid to put them before the public. We do this of our own accord, before the appointed time, for we are confident that the public will find nothing there."

This was justifiable up to a point.

The charge, admirably constructed by the famous *Avocat-général*, M. Van Maldeghem, might indeed succeed in convincing the public who do not look for the inner significance of things, and who, moreover, do

not consider such matters from a judicial standpoint. But, as a matter of fact, the indictment was built up on assumptions and subtle deductions rather than on irrefutable proof. The attentive reader might have found a good deal that was sufficiently far-fetched, just as even the best novels will sometimes tax the credulity of the practised critic. Everything that the examination had brought to light, and which has already been related, appeared in sharp relief; but how much of the main issue was still wrapped in shadow! A brief analysis will be enough to show this.

On the true nature of the relations between Armand and Mme. Bernays the *Avocat-général* was not very explicit. Though mentioning the word "adultery" he did not make it his own. He portrayed Mme. Bernays as an excitable woman, excessively highly strung, who had no sympathy for her husband, but was, nevertheless, capable of a deep and innocent friendship with the third member of their household. To incriminate Armand it was enough to picture him swayed by a frenzy of unrequited passion, avenging his thwarted desires and his bruised pride. It was on Armand far more than on his brother, who had more or less confessed to his share of the crime, that the hand of the law was laid. Léon was represented as a kind of puppet, whose every movement had been regulated by his imperious brother.

When the brothers met in Paris from the 16th to the 19th of November, after the departure of M. de Roubaix-

Pecher, it was Armand who had thought out the smallest details of the crime, including the metamorphosis of the puppet into Henry Vaughan. Léon had thereupon gone to Daumouche, hairdresser to some of the smaller theatres in Paris, for his transformation, declaring that he wanted an impenetrable disguise for a fancy-dress ball shortly to be held in a northern town. Daumouche had provided him with a wig which Léon at first accepted, but later returned after his interview with Armand. The wig was too near the shade of his own fair hair, he said, and he was not sufficiently unrecognisable. The *Avocat-général*, making a comparison of dates with this as his only evidence, declared: "It was Armand who ordered this change of disguise, in order to make absolutely certain of deceiving Bernays seven weeks later." So complete was the change, moreover, that when, a few days later, Daumouche met Léon in his wig and with his face made up, he did not recognise him. And in December, at the Hôtel Britannique in Brussels, a waiter, who had some years before served Léon daily in a restaurant in Antwerp, waited on him every day in Brussels without suspecting anything. Thus Léon's second version of the crime was definitely disproved, in which he stated that Bernays, struck by the resemblance between the so-called Henry Vaughan and the younger of the Peltzer brothers, had provoked the involuntary murder by threats and abuse.

To Armand also was attributed the responsibility for

every step taken by his brother, from his arrival in Brussels on the 5th of December to the day of the murder. Why did Léon visit Amsterdam, Bremen and Hamburg, ostensibly seeking legal advice on the bogus business of the navigation company? He was simply playing the rôle assigned to him by his brother, and giving an appearance of reality to the Murray fiction. In the house in the rue de la Loi, Léon had purposely scattered about the place several visiting cards engraved Henry Vaughan, and also cards of lawyers he had consulted in Holland and Germany, who unanimously agreed that their client had not seemed to know what he was talking about.

In answer to Armand's statement: "I thought Léon had gone back to America after I left him in Paris," the indictment declared that indications had been found of a considerable correspondence between the two brothers from November until the very eve of the crime. These "indications" were certainly vague enough, but there had also been the more tangible evidence of telegraph forms. According to the experts (among whom was M. Gobert, the expert of the Bank of France), these had without a doubt been written by one or other of the accomplices. M. Van Maldeghem boldly translated these missives, couched in sibylline phrases, on the strength of a series of logical deductions. For example, this wire from Brussels, dated the 14th of December and addressed to Louis Wouters (said to be another pseu-

donym of Léon's) at the poste restante, Hamburg, was attributed to Armand.

> Proposal B. without offering great advantages nevertheless feasible. Would draw special attention to presence C. Await meeting at first opportunity. Writing further."

With remarkable ingenuity the *Avocat-général* interpreted this obscure message thus: "Evidently this telegram is a reply to a question of Léon's: 'Would it not be as well to go to Bremen also?' Armand replies in the affirmative, but indicates there is danger in the journey to Bremen. Why? He draws Léon's attention to the presence of C. in this town. What does that mean? Nothing that we do not know already. The accused have a sister in Bremen, married to a merchant, M. Clazon (at one time in business with Armand in Buenos Aires). In going to Bremen, Léon must not forget that he has relations there who might recognise him and spoil his plans. This interpretation is confirmed by the discovery that Léon Peltzer, who in Hamburg did all his business on foot, never went about in Bremen without his carriage."

Likewise the original of a telegram of the 17th of December attributed to Armand, and addressed to Louis Wouters, Bremen, was found at the Antwerp Exchange, saying: "Sent to-day papers C. Call for them in passing." This the *Avocat-général* interpreted as: "I have sent money to Cologne to-day; claim it on your

way through." Actually Léon did go on the 17th from Bremen to Cologne, where he spent nearly forty-eight hours. Did he find the money there?

"We are forced to believe it," said M. Van Maldeghem, "even though we have no direct proof, and though the employees in the post offices at Cologne, Bremen and Hamburg have not been able to recognise the photographs of Henry Vaughan; but what post office employee in a big town could possibly remember the features of a stranger, glimpsed through a grill months before?"

There was also the wire from Léon dated the 5th of January sent from Brussels and signed "Marie" to Armand, addressed as "Astor." This was dispatched at the same time as the telegram definitely fixing the fatal rendezvous with Bernays at 159 rue de la Loi for the next day (the 7th), although the two messages were sent from different offices, the one from Brussels–Luxembourg and the other from Brussels–Ministère.

The "Marie" telegram ran: "Thanks for your delightful suggestion. Hope to see you Saturday," which meant: "Bernays agrees to come to rue de la Loi. I expect him on Saturday." At the examination Armand declared that this was simply an assignation with a woman whose name he did not know, but who had accosted him one day recently near the Gare du Nord.

But that the two telegrams came from the same source was almost miraculously proved by the expert of the Bank of France, M. Gobert. They were both in the

same handwriting (Léon's) and the telegraphic forms employed came from the same office, in the rue Pepin. On the 5th of January Henry Vaughan sent a commissionaire from the Hôtel Britannique to fetch the forms, and afterwards instructed him to take the two wires to two different post offices, so as to baffle inquiry if need be. And the proof? The forms on which the two messages were written displayed two unusual marks which proved that they had been taken from one and the same bundle. On the blank border of each was found a blot, accidentally made in the printing, and then there was an equally accidental scratch, identical on both. From which there is only one conclusion to be drawn. Armand was so impatient to learn of the accomplishment of the murder, that he went to the length of getting his brother to warn him of the exact date it was to take place. "Saturday the 7th of January."

The *Avocat-général* was no less dogmatic on the subject of the purchase of the weapon. Léon, instructed by his brother, had gone to London to buy it, after Armand had experimented in Antwerp with a pistol which he found to be too noisy, and which must be replaced by something less indiscreet.

But it was the Murray fiction that the indictment was able most successfully to pull to pieces.

"How can Léon Peltzer ever explain away the fact that he has not a single letter, not a scrap of paper in his possession, from this Murray with whom he states he

has been in close touch for three months? Who will believe that after Bernays' death he took pains to destroy papers that might prove his only defence? Who will deny that if he has now no letters from Murray it is because he never had any? And, finally, who will believe that Murray, apparently knowing of the terrible situation in which his partner has been placed by the death of Bernays, would not come to the assistance of the accused and give the evidence so valuable to Léon, and which could do himself no possible harm?"

In short, the extraordinary scaffolding of precautions, stratagems and lies built up by the two prisoners to hide them from justice and from punishment was tumbling about their ears and would crush them. Their own mother, surely the last to admit the guilt of her sons, had cried out at a moment when she could have no thought of dissimulation: "My two sons, murderers! He will have taken advantage of Léon's weakness! And all for that woman!"

CHAPTER X

You can imagine the fresh interest that such a complete statement of affairs roused throughout the whole of Belgium and beyond, in those who awaited with impatience the first day of the trial. On Monday the 27th of November the crowd began to collect at four o'clock in the morning in and around the rue de Ruysbroeck, in front of the old Palais de Justice, hoping for a place in the Court which for a whole month was to be the stage of such baffling and intriguing scenes. People had brought their lunch with them, as they did at all the subsequent sittings, so as to be able to stay until the end of the day. Among the numerous reporters present there was a special representative from a paper in Bloemfontein, South Africa!

In the hall of the Court of Assize, where M. Demeure, a judge with a high reputation for impartiality, presided in his red robes, assisted by the vice-presidents MM. Drugmann and Jamar, all eyes at once turned to the table in front of the witness box, and gazed horror-struck at the gruesome pieces of evidence there displayed. There was the weapon used in the crime, and the other revolvers found in the house at the rue de la Loi; the skull of Bernays, gaping black where the bullet had

shattered the back of the head and passed out at the other side; fragments of his bruised and torn flesh, floating in jars of alcohol; his clothes, and those of Henry Vaughan; the basin in which the latter had washed—by his account, the wound of the victim—more likely the blood from his own hands.

The people pointed out to each other the imposing galaxy of Counsel for the Defence: Edmond Picard, Lejeune, Eugène Robert, Van Calster and Schoenfeld, ranged opposite the formidable *Avocat-général*, Van Maldeghem.

From the audience, which was to prove hostile and unruly throughout the trial, an angry buzz greeted the entrance of the two accused. The premature publication of the charge had not, then, produced the effect hoped for by the Defence. On the contrary.

The Peltzers did not appear troubled by this disturbing manifestation of the *vox populi*—they were very well dressed, especially Armand, and their hands were elegantly gloved. Léon's drawn features made him seem much older than his brother, whose coolness and obvious serenity only deserted him on one or two occasions during the indictment. The reading of this, after the formalities of swearing in the jury were over, occupied the whole morning. One incident showed Léon's solicitude for his brother; Armand was coughing from time to time, and, as he felt the air growing chill, he raised the collar of his overcoat. At once the younger

brother rose and humbly but insistently asked the President if he would kindly have the window shut, for there was an icy draught; this was done.

It is not necessary to give a full account of the trial. It would mean in many instances repetition of what has already been described. It is sufficient to choose here and there incidents and arguments which may help to elucidate the problems of this drama, and to divine its hidden significances.

But first of all I must give you an interesting personal memory: I attended only one sitting of the Court, and that solely to satisfy my curiosity, for I was then too young a representative of the *Indépendance Belge* to be entrusted with the reporting of such an important affair. Moreover, a knowledge of legal terms was not among my accomplishments.

It was the eighth day of the trial when I took my place on the Press bench. Had anyone told me then that thirty years later I should be in close contact and in correspondence with Léon Peltzer, I should have declared him to be mad; for I knew nothing of the accused at the time but what everyone knew through the Press, except that I had heard of the eventful dinner in the house of Dr. Lavisé. I went to the Court as something of a psychologist and physiognomist, resolved to make up my mind as to the relative guilt of the two brothers by their faces.

My eyes never left them for a moment; I was struck

by the self-confidence that shone from behind Armand's glasses, and by the timid attitude of Léon. Two or three times when the *Avocat-général* asked the younger brother a question, I saw him glance stealthily at Armand to see if he would suggest with a look what reply he should make. I no longer doubted for a moment that Léon was entirely under Armand's thumb, that he was simply the cat's-paw, and the other the brain that was responsible for the crime.

But two unexpected incidents, the second of which took everyone aback in its stark horror, were to shake my convictions. Suddenly a cry of "Fire!" arose behind the balustrade that separated the public from the well of the court, and immediately there was a panic-stricken movement among the crowd. In a moment Armand was on his feet, and with a reassuring gesture of his gloved hand, asked the audience to keep calm, as it was nothing but the singeing of a plank near an over-heated stove.

The disconcerted judge, for he himself did not realise what had caused the cries of alarm, rose in his turn and said sharply: "Accused—sit down at once! Are you in charge of affairs here?"

Peltzer sat down without answering, but a faint smile passed over his lips, and I understood that he was pleased at having been able to show presence of mind uncommon enough to give an impression of tranquillity that could only result from a perfectly clear conscience.

Half an hour later an even more incredible incident occurred. The Prosecution had decided that the time had come to pass before the jury one of the most suggestive pieces of evidence. On the lid of a chest had been tacked down part of the blood-stained carpet, which bore the impression of a foot according to the Prosecution; of a knee, according to the Defence. This lid was so heavy that the usher, Victor Guyot, who was carrying it, stumbled beneath its weight and nearly fell. Armand, quickly stepping down from the prisoner's bar, took it from the usher, and before the President had time to interfere, himself showed the horrible object to the jury.

The sight of this self-possession made me shudder. It was a sublime or a monstrous gesture. Sublime if, according to his own version, Armand had had nothing to do with the crime, for then it must have been Heaven that inspired him with this method of tacitly displaying the calm of his conscience before the blood that had been shed; monstrous if he was guilty, for then what frightful hypocrisy and unbelievable cynicism was it, that so coolly held forth before the eyes of the jury the most visible and tangible proof of his guilt. Lady Macbeth could not bear the sight of the infamous scarlet that stained her fingers—she tried to wash it away. . . .

I do not know what effect this action of Armand's had upon the jury, but if I had been one of them and next moment the verdict was to be pronounced, I would

have hesitated to declare him guilty: the action had seemed to me so essentially that of an innocent man, victim of an unjust suspicion.

To banish that impression I had to recall the imperturbable sang-froid with which the same Armand had lectured before the Antwerp engineers on the Electrical Exhibition, when, according to the indictment, he had just heard from his brother that the murder would take place two days later.

" A past master in the art of dissembling ! " M. Van Maldeghem said of him, and more than once in his speech for the Crown he flung at him the epithet " sinister comedian." Was not this just another specimen of his abominable mastery in the art of dissimulation ?

But to return to the trial.

During the preliminary examination of Léon it was obvious that his main object was to clear his brother from suspicion, even at his own expense.

" Armand," he said, " has always been good to me. He has helped me with advice and with money. If I had listened to him I should still be in Antwerp, an honourable merchant. In Paris he earnestly begged me not to go on with the interoceanic affair of Murray's —if I had followed his advice I should not be here now."

" Was it not your brother who told you to change the wig when you were preparing your disguise as Henry Vaughan ? "

" No, indeed it was not, it was Murray."

And the accused declared that Armand had already returned to Antwerp before the exchange of wigs had been decided upon. " It is Daumouche who is mistaken about the dates when the wigs were delivered; I will convince him of his error when he is brought into the witness box."

" When you met Armand at the Hôtel du Commerce in Paris, did he tell you of his quarrels with Bernays ? "

" Yes, but in a spirit of sorrow (that is, without anger or ill-feeling)."

The President then worried the accused with questions about the mythical Murray.

" Look for him harder than you have done; you will find him. If he does not come to my aid, it is no doubt because he is a crook, and is frightened of falling into the hands of the police—that was what my brother thought."

" Did you not say that in the case of Bernays' decease Armand might marry the widow ? "

" Good God! when the examining magistrate was bombarding me with questions I did say something of the sort. My brother is a highly respected man, and he was perfectly worthy of this lady, if Bernays had happened to die . . . a natural death."

" You know that we have reason to believe that after the death of Bernays and your flight, someone let himself into 159 rue de la Loi to alter the position of the corpse ? "

" It is not true."

" What was the reason of the letter from Bâle indicating where the corpse of your victim was to be found, if not to ensure the certificate of death which alone would enable your brother to marry Mme. Bernays ? "

" It was my brother who dictated the letter out of pure humanity, and sympathy for the family and relatives of the dead man."

The President then came back to Murray, and discussed means of getting on his track. Léon was embarrassed, and could not resist a slight movement of the head towards Armand, as though to ask : " What shall I say ? "

He would say nothing more.

Armand, questioned in his turn, seemed to be concerned above all in defending Mme. Bernays' reputation.

" There has never passed between us anything but what passes between any lady and gentleman who respect each other. We have nothing to blush for in our friendship, though we have been spied upon and slandered by a pack of vulgar servants."

" Is it true that you acted as go-between for Bernays and certain women, or one woman ? "

" I did no more than receive for Bernays letters which he could not receive in his own house, and once I gave him an address in Paris."

" It has been suggested that Mme. Bernays used to pay your expenses from her own pocket."

" My character is above such an odious insinuation. I, Armand Peltzer, accept presents from a lady!" (Murmurs in the audience.)

" You thought of marrying Mme. Bernays?"

" Never, because she was not free and because I still cherish the memory of my wife."

" What have you to say to the letter from your brother Robert, begging you to banish from your thoughts the memory of this woman?"

" That I am not responsible for what my brother writes. Besides, you know that you can hang a man with a couple of lines away from their context. Robert was lecturing me because I had delayed in giving him certain information with regard to the business. He attributed the delay to a sentimental preoccupation, whereas I was actually absorbed by my arrangements to take up the directorship of the transport undertaking on the Meuse."

" And your mother's cry to Dr. Lavisé: 'My two sons, murderers! and all for that woman!'"

" My mother, when, against every existing law, she was questioned, repudiated these words uttered in the hysteria of grief when she was not in a state of mind to know what she was saying. If it is the case of the word of the judge against my mother's word, I do not hesitate for an instant."

Several times Armand treated the charge as a " romance," or, reversing the rôles, posed questions to

the President: "You believe this?" "You admit that?"

They returned to Mme. Bernays.

"I have for her a deep and pure affection; she is a great-hearted woman who has been a sister to me. There are fathers among the gentlemen of the jury. I put it to them; can they conceive me capable of such an immoral and unnatural relationship with the woman who loves my little daughter like a mother? I have the right to protest in the name of my dignity."

"Do you believe in the existence of this Murray?"

"I believe in him as do many others." (Laughter.)

Armand energetically denied the authorship of certain of the intercepted telegrams, and refused to admit the official interpretation of his secret language with Léon, "a language used simply to reduce telegraphic expenses."

"It has been suggested that the letter from Bâle was written to safeguard an insurance of 100,000 francs which Bernays had taken out in favour of his son Endé."

"It is an infamous slander like your other explanation that pictures me trying to legalise the death of my friend so as to be able to marry his widow."

Proudly the accused acknowledged that he had lied and plotted *after* the death of Bernays; it was the necessary outcome of his decision to save his brother.

Of the famous yellow trunk he refused to say more than that which he had already declared at the examina-

tion; it was a sacred trust, and his honour—honour before all—forbade him to explain further.

His examination was over; a number of lawyers were enthusiastic over his coolness, his quickness of repartee, and his skill in dispute.

CHAPTER XI

The evidence of the Public Prosecutor, Willemaers, and of the examining magistrate did no more than throw light on some obscure details.

Léon declared that he had met Murray at the Hôtel du Commerce in Paris both before and after Armand's visit. It had been found that his only visitor had declared himself to be his brother, but did not reveal his identity, for Léon had registered himself as Jules Kérouan. At Manchester, a man named Strenger had been found, to whom Léon had one day said that if he ever came across anyone who stood in his way, he would soon get rid of him.

The next witness was Bernays' German friend and collaborator, the Baron von Arden, to whom the lawyer had sent his last sad letter, on the eve of his death. He used occasionally to come to Antwerp, he said. He had observed the coldness (passive on Bernays' side) between husband and wife. Bernays had said to him: "I have an enemy whose very name I cannot mention without shuddering." Yes, the Antwerp lawyer had thought a great deal of money, but his household expenses were very heavy. The Baron von Arden spoke very

highly of his unfortunate friend and literary associate. "He was amusing and witty outside his own home, so much so that when he came to see me in Germany, all my friends in the squadron of the 11th Hussars were charmed with the high spirits of 'ce bon petit Belge.'" (Laughter.)

A sensation was caused by the entry of the second witness, Victor Bernays, the father (septuagenarian and deaf) of the murdered man. In deep mourning, hardly able to speak French, he had to give his evidence in German, which was translated by an interpreter.

He stated that he had consented against his better judgment to the marriage of his son with Mlle. Julie Pecher. He had not heard of the friction between husband and wife until October 1881, and had then vainly advised Guillaume to obtain a divorce. From the 8th to the 19th of January he and his wife had been left without any news of the disappearance of their son, whom they too were anxiously seeking. After Mme. Bernays had identified the corpse in the rue de la Loi, she had come to see him in the rue Montoyer, and had said to him, "How do you do, Papa?" He had said to her, "Go away," and had shut the door in her face. She had later asked him for two portraits of her dead husband; he had given her one, as he only had two. After his evidence the unhappy old father withdrew sobbing.

Then followed the evidence of Armand Auger, stock-

broker, son of Bernays' former partner. Bernays was fond of money, even grasping, he said, and Vaughan (alias Léon) in sending a fee of 500 francs in advance played upon this weakness. The unfortunate lawyer had had a premonition that Armand would trick him into a meeting somehow, and feared violence. It was true that after his quarrel with his wife Bernays had consoled himself with one of the maid-servants.

At this point the Defence obliged the witness to confess that he had once taken his mistress to dine at Bernays' house when Mme. Bernays was away. The Defence considered that in receiving this irregular company at his table, Bernays was insulting his wife.

Before Mme. Bernays herself was called upon, almost two whole sittings were taken up by the hearing of some of her former servants. Their evidence was revoltingly coarse and of little value; it competed with some of the most offensive pages of Emile Zola's *Pot-Bouille*, which at that moment was being much talked about and causing a good deal of scandal.

It was a procession of twenty-five cooks, chambermaids, governesses, seamstresses and gardeners, headed by the German-Swiss woman Amélie Pfister, whom Mme. Bernays had cuffed and sent packing. Amélie, almost elegantly dressed, confessed that she had added considerably to her information after she had been given notice. She insisted on the fact that Mme. Bernays had looked after Armand when he was ill, and that

when Madame herself had been subject to her " more or less genuine " fits of hysteria she had called Armand to her aid.

Almost the only thing made plain by the servants' evidence was the fact that most of them had done their utmost to ferret out a scandal, and to that end had assiduously spied on their master, and even more on their mistress. They had even sent the hall-porter's small child to the keyhole of the boudoir, with instructions to see what he could of Mme. Bernays' behaviour with Armand,[1] and repeat it below-stairs. In spite of this malicious and constant watch, they had found absolutely nothing in the behaviour of either to which exception could be taken, unless by someone determined to see evil in the most natural and innocent actions.

In reality this band of spies had defeated their own purpose. To have secretly and carefully watched the two supposed lovers, and only to have scraped up such a miserable collection of evidence, was to prove the opposite of what they were so anxious to declare.

Some of the servants did admit that Mme. Bernays was a passionately devoted mother, and that her husband was a man worthy of admiration in many ways.

Most of these gossiping women contradicted each other on all the important points. One of them reported

[1] No doubt it was the recollection of this that inspired the scene of Maeterlinck's, where the jealous Golaud hoists his child Yniold up to a window to spy upon Pelleas and Melisande.

Mme. Bernays as having made to her the most improbable confessions, expressed in terms so abominably realistic that could it have been foreseen, she would never have been questioned in the public court. The allegation was, as a matter of fact, subsequently gone into *in camera*, and found to be worthless.

The inanity of the greater part of the servants' evidence was particularly noticeable *à propos* of a declaration made by Julie Raskaert. She stated that she had seen Armand Peltzer, whom she hardly knew, with Mme. Bernays at the Antwerp station on the 31st of December, about three months after the break between the lawyer and his friend, and seven days before the murder. When the President Demeure asked this woman to look at the prisoners and say which of the two was Armand, she pointed without hesitation to Léon, who was so unlike his brother that it was impossible to mistake one for the other. The Prosecution later agreed that this witness was unbalanced, and the Defence expressed their scorn and justifiable scepticism of the whole lot of these backstairs witnesses. Supposing that there had been a scrap of truth, or anything resembling the truth in their tales, they only succeeded in leaving a general impression of incredulity and disgust.

The rather confused evidence of Maria Duponchel was then heard. She had been a servant of Armand Peltzer until his arrest. She confirmed the story of the trial pistol shot on Christmas Eve, which had struck her

as extraordinary, and declared that after the discovery of the corpse her master had seemed greatly agitated, and had burnt quantities of papers; he had also removed a portrait of Léon from his photograph album. She added that after the visit of the magistrate, M. Ketels, Armand had reproached her for having mentioned the pistol shot and the yellow trunk, and that she had said finally: "You see what love can bring you to." She also admitted that when M. Ketels had entered Armand's house, he had found her tearing the labels off her master's old trunks, apparently in great haste. This girl's memory, however, was not very reliable when it came to the chronological order of events, so important in this case.

Then Bernays' former clerk, Henry Van der Voort, was heard with vivid interest. The lawyer had said to him on the day before his death: "What will they do to me next? They are capable of anything."

"On what occasion did Bernays say this to you?"

"After telling me that that very morning he had learnt from a letter that his wife and Armand were 'still seeing each other at the house of M. and Mme. de Roubaix-Pecher.' As soon as I heard that M. Bernays had been murdered, I suspected M. Peltzer, because of the prophetic words of his victim, and also because of M. Peltzer's previous attempts to provoke a duel."

CHAPTER XII

When the next witness, Mme. Bernays' uncle, M. Victor Pecher, was called, there was an expectant rustle of curiosity among the crowd.

M. Victor Pecher attributed the first misunderstandings between his niece and her husband to Bernays' infatuation for one of the servants, Marie-Thérèse, a girl of rare beauty. Whilst praising the intelligence and energy of the husband, he criticised his violent temper and the instability of his political and philosophical opinions. On the other hand, he spoke warmly in defence of his niece Julie. She had an heroic spirit and a generous heart. Her courageous nature might indeed have made her imprudent, but she was incapable of a disgraceful action. "Her greatest joy is to devote herself to others; at this very moment she is consecrating her energies to bringing a consumptive back to health. It is quite possible that M. Armand Peltzer may have been in love with her, but however that may be, I answer for the absolute innocence of Mme. Bernays. I know her, she is my niece, my own flesh and blood!" In other words, if there had been a guilty passion, it had been entirely one-sided. Mme. Bernays had never

encouraged it, and had never felt for Armand more than a deep and pure friendship.

On the 2nd of December, at the sixth sitting, and amid an unseemly clamour, Mme. Bernays appeared, drawing aside the veil that hid her shining hair, and showing a white, almost bloodless face, whose pallor emphasised the brilliance of her great green eyes. She was extremely nervous, and at first her replies were almost inaudible, but her voice gradually grew stronger, until her words were clear and distinct. She spoke with the educated accents of a lady of culture.

The President questioned her very little and seemed to leave her to choose what she wanted to say.

She began by stating that she had for her husband's memory nothing but compassion and forgiveness. If she had to mention the wrongs he had done her, it would only be to serve the interests of justice. These wrongs were grave. Her husband, who had conceived a violent passion for one of the servants, had abused, insulted and struck his own wife. " In league with another servant (Julie Raskaert), who had visions of becoming Mme. Bernays, Amélie Pfister managed to organise a scheme to drive me out of my wits with terror. I was forced to take refuge in my parents' home." She said that the conversation of Amélie Pfister was shameful. " I am not a young girl, I am no longer even a young woman, for I am over thirty. Well, I would blush to have to

repeat the abominable language which that young girl of twenty-three used as a matter of course."

In referring to the episode of the dismissal of "this person," Mme. Bernays declared that her husband, who had at first been afraid to deal harshly with the slanderer, had finally said to his wife: "You were perfectly right." She hotly denied ever having asked her husband to make up the quarrel with "M. Armand Peltzer." It was M. de Longé who, in the interests of her dignity and to silence spiteful gossip, had advised a public reconciliation: there was no question of resuming their former intimacy in the home.

In answer to the President she admitted that in 1876, when the question of divorce was first considered, it was the intervention of "M. Armand Peltzer" that had made peace between them.

She corroborated all that had already been discovered, with this shade of difference. When on the 18th of January she heard of the letter from Bâle, signed "Henry Vaughan," and begged M. Peltzer to tell her whether he knew this mysterious individual, it was not because she suspected him, but because she naturally wanted to get hold of all possible information as to the circumstances of her husband's death. M. Peltzer's denials had, in any case, fully reassured her at the time.

The President abstained from questioning the young widow on the nature of her relations with Armand.

Had she not implicitly and sufficiently proclaimed her innocence by her indignant protests against the suspicions of her husband and the servants?

Mme. Bernays, after a quarter of an hour, during which she spoke almost without interruption, withdrew, very dignified beneath her crape veil. There was a hum of disappointment among the audience, who had no doubt anticipated some melodramatic interludes, and had evidently hoped that Mme. Bernays would be tortured with questions as though she herself were the culprit.

At the entrance of the lady who had been his friend, clad in deepest mourning, Armand gave an involuntary start. Never for a moment did he take his eyes off her, and seemed almost to be drinking in her words. Towards the end of her evidence he took his handkerchief and wiped the lenses of his eyeglasses, dimmed with tears. Mme. Bernays had only given one almost expressionless glance towards him as she entered, after which she appeared unconscious of her surroundings, as though she were in a dream.

"Bernays was a loyal and good man," said the next witness, M. Auger (senior), who had been, first, employer and then partner of the victim. M. Auger, who had been present at the search among Bernays' papers, stated that nothing had been removed except securities, including an insurance policy in favour of Endé.

"Were his affairs in order?"

"Yes, he followed my example." (Loud laughter from the audience, whom the President was obliged, almost daily, to threaten with expulsion.)

Then came the statement of the first President of Appeal, M. de Longé, who had been consulted long before, when M. and Mme. Bernays had for a short time considered divorce, and also in connection with the *modus vivendi* established between them. This witness annoyed the malevolent audience by the fervour with which he denounced the aspersions that had been cast on the virtue of Mme. Bernays, an intimate friend of his own daughter.

"She is," he declared in accents of profound conviction, "an honourable and sincere lady, warm-hearted and impetuous. Her chivalrous and generous nature makes her think perhaps too much of other people's happiness, but I, who have known her for a long time, believe her to be absolutely incapable of telling a lie or of ever having been Peltzer's mistress. Her husband himself never really believed such a thing, and exonerated her once and for all in the terms of the *modus vivendi*."

M. de Roubaix-Pecher, the distinguished brother-in-law of Mme. Bernays, was heard with no slackening of interest. He indignantly protested against the servants' gossip that had suggested that his house had been a rendezvous where his sister and M. Peltzer had frequently arranged to meet behind the lawyer's back.

His sister and Peltzer had only once met in his house after the quarrel, and that was by pure chance. Their behaviour had always been unexceptionable.

" You were with Armand at the Exhibition of Electricity in Paris last November ? Did you notice nothing unusual during your stay at the Hôtel Chatham ? "

" Nothing."

" Armand never mentioned his brother Léon, nor the fact that he had just met him ? "

" He never breathed a word on the subject, and he appeared to be without a care in the world. In any case, I had to leave Paris before Armand and before the date of the interview between the two brothers. Later, on the 5th January, I was naturally among those who heard his fine lecture given to the Association of Engineers at the Exhibition."

Then came a railway employee, Joseph Decelle, in charge of the poste restante at Chaudfontaine at the time when Mme. Bernays was there with her son, for the sake of her health (in 1878). He stated that before the arrival of Armand in this lonely watering-place Mme. Bernays used to visit the post office several times a day to receive letters addressed only with her initials. He had thought this was suspicious behaviour for a married woman. However, later he saw her several times with Armand and did not notice anything reprehensible in their demeanour. On the other hand, he had overheard in a public park a snatch of conversation between

Mme. Bernays and her husband, who had said to her: "When are you going to put an end to this fooling?"

The Defence did their best to discredit this witness, (1) because on account of fairly serious irregularities he had been transferred from the postal service to the railway, and (2) because in the course of his evidence he made a big mistake in the dates.

"I defy you to doubt my oath," protested the witness amid the applause of the public, whom the President admonished severely.

What is the reason for the presence of M. Charles de Mot, brother of the predecessor of M. Adolphe Max at the Hôtel de Ville in Brussels? He had once known Léon in Buenos Aires, and had there witnessed his disgrace. One day when they were talking of the arrest of a certain American murderer, Léon had said: "Criminals always take too many precautions after the crime and never enough before." It is true that at that time he could not have been contemplating the murder of Bernays.

The lawyers present in the audience began to whisper among themselves: "That is simply a platitude," said one, "we have all said as much."

"But we have not all committed a murder since," replied another. Léon was perhaps giving a hint of his future methods in crime.

The usher then called the witness Joseph Favre, waiter at the Hôtel du Commerce, where, under the

name of Jules Kérouan, Léon had stayed at the time when he met his brother in Paris.

" Léon," he said, " having taken two rooms, used to unmake both beds every day, perhaps to lend colour to the story of the expected visit from Murray; but at the time I simply thought that the foreigner was giving me two beds to make every morning out of spite. No Murray ever turned up—Jules Kérouan's only visitor was his brother."

Great curiosity was displayed at the entrance of the already famous Parisian wig-maker, Louis Daumouche, who had metamorphosed Léon into Henry Vaughan, ostensibly for a masked ball. When, according to the time-honoured formula, he was asked to state that he was neither kith nor kin to the accused, he delighted the audience by replying with animation:

" I am thankful to say I am not! "

Léon had approached Daumouche when he was in a box at the Comédie Parisienne, and had given his name as Lefebure.

The wig-maker supplied no fresh information, but there was a positive duel of words between him and Léon on the subject of the dates when the two wigs were ordered and delivered. Léon's aim was to prove that his brother could not possibly have suggested his final disguise, as he had returned to Antwerp before the change was decided upon. But the Figaro of the rue de Trévise would not take back his chronological version

which had been adopted by the Prosecution. And after a long and vain argument between the witness and the one-time Henry Vaughan, they remained at loggerheads. The question was whether the jury would accept the word of the wig-maker or that of his customer.

They listened attentively to the London gunsmith, Beesley, from whom Léon had bought the weapon used in the crime: " the best possible quality of pistol."

" This client seemed to me to be an excellent shot. Three out of six trial shots that he fired hit the mark."

Beesley was succeeded by a London police officer. He gave an account of the numerous fruitless attempts he had made to find the mythical Murray, or any of the shareholders in the imaginary interoceanic company. He had, however, discovered in London the jeweller's shop where Léon had had the names " Henry and Lucy 1871 " engraved on the ring which he had left at the house in the rue de la Loi, to create a belief in an authentic Henry Vaughan, married, and the father of a family. This ring inscribed " 1871 " was actually bought at the end of 1881 to serve in the nefarious scheme of the criminal.

What had M. Castreuil and Oscar Cools to say, respectively proprietor and head waiter at the Hôtel Britannique in Brussels, where Léon had occasionally stayed between the 27th of November 1881 and the 6th of January 1882? This:

" He always seemed to be in a good humour; it was

obvious that he wore a wig (like many bald men), but he resembled so little the normal Léon Peltzer that Cools did not recognise him, although he had known Léon for many years, and in spite of the fact that 'Vaughan' was on such good terms with the waiter that he shared with him a bottle of champagne on the 6th of January —the 6th of January, the day before the crime! Was he trying to drown his fears before moving into 159 rue de la Loi, where he spent the night? None of the luggage of this traveller, who declared he had come from Glasgow, was labelled, therefore there was nothing to show that he had simply come from Paris. He must have removed the labels as carefully as he had removed his buttons and other tell-tale marks from his clothes."

The interesting evidence of M. Guyau, the furniture dealer, followed. It was from him that Vaughan had ordered the furniture for his house in the rue de la Loi. His client had been in a great hurry, especially for the window curtains, which would give the house an inhabited look, for he was expecting a visit from a lawyer from Antwerp on the 7th of January.

"But why not receive him in the Hôtel Britannique?" I said; "that would be much simpler than in a house still so unprepared." He objected that in a hotel conversations were liable to be overheard. In view of the expected visit on Saturday, he had told a workman not to come that day to finish his job, and when the man turned up in spite of instructions, he was sent away,

although he assured M. Peltzer that the work would only take a quarter of an hour. One day he told me that he did not want to live in Antwerp, as it was too unhealthy a place for his wife and child. I pointed out that the house in rue de la Loi was close to the malodorous marshes of Saint-Josse. He changed the subject.

(It must be understood that Léon's apparent bungle in announcing beforehand his interview with the Antwerp lawyer was calculated carelessness, because it would lead the law on the false track of Henry Vaughan.)

After M. Guyau it was the owner of the unfurnished house, 159 rue de la Loi, M. Almeyn, who stepped forward. To him Henry Vaughan had declared himself to be an Australian by birth. He had paid six months' rent in advance, after having asked for a plan of the house, which he was obliged to submit to his Company (to Armand, according to the Prosecution). He told M. Almeyn, as he had told M. Guyau, that he had money in the Brugmann Bank, which was a lie, but which appeared at the time to be true, for that bank actually had a client named Vaughan (though how Léon Peltzer came to hear of it was a mystery).

When cross-examined by the Defence, M. Almeyn admitted that Léon had not given him the impression of a shady adventurer plotting a crime—far from it.

Police officer De Keyser, who, on the 7th of March, arrested Léon in the train leaving Cologne, declared that the younger Peltzer was at the time calling himself

Dr. Lambos (a pseudonym employed for the last communications exchanged with Armand through Dr. Lavisé). Disconcerted for a moment or two when he found he had been discovered, and was being taken to the station-master's office, he promptly confessed that it was he who, disguised as Henry Vaughan, had "accidentally" killed Bernays. He pretended he was hurrying on his way to explain matters to the authorities in Brussels, and on account of his haste was ready to dispense with the formalities of extradition.

It was on the eighth day of the trial (the 5th of December) that the fire alarm episode took place, which I have already described, and also the incident of the blood-stained carpet which Armand himself showed to the jury.

This last incident interrupted the evidence of Dr. Stiénon, one of the medical experts who conducted the post-mortem on the body of Bernays. Dr. Stiénon energetically denied the version of accidental homicide. Léon, his eyes opening and shutting painfully, watched this witness as he handled the mutilated skull of the lawyer, and declared that he had been killed point blank from behind. Dr. Stiénon stated that he could discern on the stained carpet the footprint of a man, who must have come some time after the crime to adjust the position of the rigid corpse. Dr. Oscar Laroche fully agreed with his colleague, except in the matter of the adjusting of the corpse.

The opinion of Dr. Vleminckx, explained at great length, was even more definite. He recognised the impression on the carpet as that of Armand's foot, as his everyday shoes coincided perfectly with the print, and the scientifically exact statements of the well-known chemist, Berge, and of Professor Depaire, pointed to the same conclusion.

But the evidence was to give rise to an amazing epic battle between the medical experts.

The doctors called in by the Defence uncompromisingly contradicted the medical experts of the Crown. It was not true that Bernays had bled more from the nose than from the back of the head, it was the other way about. It was not the case that the position of the body had been tampered with after the crime by Armand or by anyone else. The corpse had been lifted up immediately after death, and placed by Léon himself in the arm-chair where it was found. As to the impression in the blood on the carpet, it was that of a knee (and therefore Léon's) and not of a foot. No less dogmatic than the experts for the Prosecution, the doctors Quillery and Scheenfeld, for the Defence, supported their conclusions with technical arguments, apparently no less convincing than those of the doctors they contradicted. Moreover, as they triumphantly declared, they had illustrated their theories by practical experiments. They had killed numberless dogs by shooting them in the back of the head, to find in what way they fell, how

they bled, and in what manner they died under given conditions.

The jury were bewildered, and President Demeure, who no longer maintained his Presidential calm, called back the doctors Vleminckx, Stiénon and Depaire to confront them with the experts for the Defence. There ensued a fierce duel of words between the two bands of warriors. The experts of the Crown remained unshaken in their conviction, which they, like their adversaries, buttressed with quotations from scientific authorities.

"Read what Tardieu says on the subject," cried one.

"Turn to Hoffmann's book," retorted the other, and dragged in his countless experiments on dogs; to which the experts for the Crown replied that they had sacrificed jus as many of the friends of man as their opponents in their zeal to find the truth.

Both sides were equally convinced of their infallibility. They each demonstrated the falseness of the other's point of view, by proving the inevitable rightness of their own, and with any amount of technical "proofs" they swept the ground from under each other's feet.

Molière would have turned a scene like this into a rollicking farce, directed against the fallibility of science and the arrogance of her practitioners. Even as it was, everybody realised the humour of the situation. In

the end, the two accused themselves were sharing in the general hilarity, especially as M. Eugène Robert summed up the situation thus:

"We shall never be able to get these gentlemen to agree with each other. It will always be white to the one side and black to the other."

But the humour of this conflict does not prevent us from seeing its melancholy side. It looks as though it were almost impossible to arrive at the most simple truths, and that the most exact science must always be relative and fallible! Does it mean that all evidence is equally valueless? That the experts, hypnotised by the requirements of whichever side has employed them, in spite of themselves, and in all good faith, are speaking, not in the cause of truth, but for the side that has requisitioned their advice?

One thing is certain, that big criminal cases are terrible misfortunes for animals, particularly for dogs, and that, on the pretext of avenging the death of a human being, innocent beasts, who ask no more than to be allowed to live, are "experimentally" tortured and slaughtered. Experimentally and uselessly, for this massacre only serves to set half the physiologists flying at the other half's throats. The same senseless sacrifice of life has occurred since in the Steinmann case, in the affair of the suicide of young Philippe Daudet, and in many others. Let the societies whose aim it is to protect such animals make a special study of the reports of celebrated cases.

They will nowhere find such valuable weapons against the immolation of our so-called " dumb friends " on the altar of investigations whose contradictory results are invariably worthless.

These Homeric contests of the medical experts were interspersed with evidence which had no connection with them. A coachman of Antwerp: " It was I who on the 19th or 20th of January drove Armand and the mysterious yellow trunk." " Where ? " " To the Gare d'Est " (where all trace of the trunk was definitely lost).

A clerk of Antwerp, Alphonse Lemaire, who had unwittingly, like Dr. Lavisé, served as messenger in Armand's secret correspondence, followed. He admitted that he was the man whom the elder of the Peltzers had charged to buy and bring him a yellow leather trunk, to which he was to give an appearance of age by tearing off one or two of the straps. If questioned about the trunk, he had been told to say that it was his own. When the accused had taken the trunk he had said to the witness: " Here is something which they will never find."

The President, to Armand: " You are in a terrible situation. What was in the yellow trunk, and what became of it ? "

Armand: " I cannot tell. I appeal to the jury; a man has trusted me, he made me promise on my honour never to mention anything regarding it, as it concerned

an intrigue which involves a well-known society lady. Have I the right to betray his confidence? Never."

The *Avocat-général:* "For you this trunk is an inviolable secret, for us it is a mystery . . . easy to see through!"

Let us pass quickly over the evidence of the accountants, who declared that in Armand's very incomplete records (he was not a business man, and therefore not bound to keep regular accounts) they had not found any trace of his having sent money to his brother, and that his books appeared to have been faithfully kept.

It is true that one witness, a friend of Armand's, who had sometimes lent him money, declared: "If I *had* advanced him money under an oath of secrecy, I should not divulge it, even here." From which it is evident that Armand might well have borrowed the money to defray his brother's expenses without it ever being possible to prove it. And indeed the big question of where the money came from was never settled.

One of Armand's former clerks, Van Bredael, gave crushing evidence against him. He had been commissioned by Armand to go to the Dutch frontier to dispatch a telegram written in code, on foreign paper. His employer had told him to hide the message in his mouth, rolled in a ball, until he reached the telegraph office across the frontier. Armand had even made him put the message in his mouth in his presence, to make

sure that there was no unusual bulge which might attract suspicion.

The Defence declared this evidence to be worthless because the witness had been brought to the Court from the prison of the Petits-Carmes, where he was doing two years for swindling.

CHAPTER XIII

On the 6th of December the Court did not sit until one o'clock in the afternoon. The morning was occupied by a visit to the scene of the crime. The jury were driven in three carriages, the magistrates and lawyers occupied several other vehicles, and finally the accused were driven each in a different carriage, escorted by gendarmes. King Leopold II, who happened to be riding through the streets at the time, caught sight of the procession and hastily galloped out of the way.

A crowd had collected in front of No. 159, and hissed first Léon and then Armand: there was talk of lynching them. At the end of the visit, which lasted a full hour, the crowd, which had considerably increased, became still more demonstrative. Thousands of fists were shaken at Léon, who, livid and trembling, muttered: "This is horrible," and at Armand, who was pale but haughty and disdainful. A tempest of imprecations and abuse broke from the crowd. "Death! death to the murderers! Hurrah for the scaffold!" Gendarmes and policemen had their work cut out to save the accused from the fury of the populace, who had condemned without waiting for the law to condemn.

What had taken place within the abandoned house? It transpired next day. A dummy of straw, dressed in the murdered man's clothes, representing the corpse, had been dispensed with as unnecessary. The *Avocat-général* and the Counsels for the Defence had indicated to the jury the exact spot of the murder and the precise arrangement of the furniture. Léon was made to reconstruct the crime in all its details, according to his version. He did this without faltering, but in Armand's interest he insisted on the way in which he had *knelt* to raise the victim, where the Prosecution declared they detected a footprint. With real or assumed indignation Armand, when he was called upon, denied all knowledge of the place, "since this is the first time I have set foot in the house." The jury, who had hitherto asked singularly few questions, demanded explanation of several details, and inspected the house from top to bottom.

At the afternoon sitting the faces of Léon and Armand betrayed nothing of the morning's harrowing experiences. They listened apathetically to the evidence with regard to Armand's movements on the 7th of January, the day of the murder, evidence agreeing that he did not leave Antwerp on that date. Even Léon seemed to have taken precautions to enable him to establish an alibi for the fatal day; for in the evening he had entered the Café de l'Empereur, and there challenged Colonel Fix, who hardly knew him, to a game of dominoes.

To the Colonel's great surprise he was called as witness for the Defence.

" The game of dominoes was obviously nothing more than a pretext," declared Colonel Fix. " M. Peltzer played so badly that I said to him, ' When one knows nothing about a game, one does not as a rule attempt to play it.' "

After this a wave of expectation passed over the audience. Dr. Remy Lavisé was the next witness. He added nothing to what we already know of the scenes that took place in his house, and the involuntary cry of Mme. Peltzer: " My sons, both murderers ! "

The President hardly questioned Armand's denunciator, perhaps wishing to spare a witness in such a trying situation, and whose decisive revelations to the Parquet had caused such severe criticism from certain quarters. In spite of the passage in the indictment, which had praised him highly for having overcome the natural qualms of friendship, and having courageously done his duty as a citizen by throwing light upon a hitherto impenetrable mystery, anonymous " friendship first " fanatics had written to Dr. Lavisé, ironically congratulating him on having earned the reward of 25,000 francs promised to whoever would deliver up Henry Vaughan. Naturally the good doctor would have refused such a thing with horror had the Prosecution insulted him by offering it.

Even to-day there are veterans who persist in blaming

the action of the doctor: as if a man who suddenly appears as a murderer—and a murderer who has abused the blind faith of friendship to make an accomplice of its giver—were still a friend, for whom honour, security and the future of wife and children must be sacrificed! But this is another of the problems of conscience raised by the Peltzer Case.[1]

After Dr. Lavisé appeared the Israelite publican, Goldschmidt, who declared that after the visit of the examining judge, and before his arrest, Armand had taken up the attitude of a martyr, and had said to him: "I will make that man, Willemaers, pay in drops of blood for what he has wrung from me in drops of sweat."

[1] At the time Maurice Castan, the German manager of the Panopticon in Brussels, solved this problem for himself in practical German fashion. A compatriot and friend of Armand's, he did not hesitate to fashion from memory the figure of the eldest brother, shortly before his arrest, and exhibit it for money in his waxwork exhibition, beside a Daumouche in the act of disguising Léon.

CHAPTER XIV

The evidence of the ninety-one witnesses for the Crown was over. Then began the procession of witnesses for the Defence, some of them chosen apparently with singularly little reason.

The first, an Antwerp engineer, M. De Keyser, had met Armand at the Exhibition of Electricity in Paris. No one could have been calmer; it was the same seven weeks later when he gave his remarkable lecture at Antwerp on the Exhibition: "In spite of his rather abrupt manner I always found him an agreeable acquaintance."

"Léon always seemed to me to have a very peaceful disposition," said M. de Resse, who had once known the younger brother in the Argentine.

The lawyer, M. Wiener, the representative sent by the Parquet to Bremen and to Hamburg, declared that one of the four or five legal men Vaughan had consulted there had thought him perfectly serious and to be acting in good faith.

Police Officer Gilta, commissioned on the 10th of February to search for secret telegrams addressed to Armand, stated that on the 17th a veiled lady, dressed in

black, had presented herself at the poste restante in Antwerp to claim the letter addressed to " Marie S."

" There you are ! " exclaimed the Counsel for the Accused. " It is a case of the woman who had accosted Armand and James at the Gare du Nord in Brussels. It was she who wrote the telegram of the 5th of January, signed ' Marie ' attributed to Léon by the Prosecution, and interpreted absolutely falsely."

At the request of the Defence the examining magistrate, M. Ketels, was recalled and recollected that James Peltzer, on whom no suspicion rested, when separately questioned, had also stated that in his presence Armand had been accosted at the Gare du Nord by this Marie, and had since carried on an amorous correspondence with her.

From this the Defence concluded that if the Prosecution had in one case been so badly mistaken as to the origin and meaning of a telegram, they might very well be wrong in every case.

It was true that a watch had been kept at the poste restante, since the 17th of February, to surprise and interrogate " Marie S." and had had absolutely no result. The veiled lady was not seen again. Perhaps she was a female " Murray " ? Certain of the jury looked perplexed. What a sphinx indeed is truth.

According to the statement of a hairdresser in Antwerp, Simons by name, whose wife had been in service with the Bernays for four or five years, she had

always protested against the gossip that made Mme. Bernays Armand's mistress.

Other witnesses from Kreuznach and from Chaudfontaine stated that they had never noticed any unwonted familiarity between Mme. Bernays and her friend.

Here there came a question of the physiological grounds which had, after the birth of Endé, determined Mme. Bernays to live with her husband "like brother and sister." It was thought that these might well have made adultery a physical impossibility. The Defence demanded the opinion of Mme. Bernays' former doctor, M. Dewandre, and President Demeure announced a sitting *in camera*. He called upon the lawyers not concerned in the case to leave the Court with the public, as gentlemen ready to sacrifice the prerogative of their profession out of respect for a lady. One or two demurred at first, but after consulting among themselves ended by deferring to the honourable request of the President.

The private hearing lasted for nearly three-quarters of an hour, and nothing resulted from it except what will later appear in the speech for the Crown.

The public was re-admitted, and the lawyer, Frédéric Delvaux, the friend of the Pechers, of Mme. Bernays and of Armand, was called to the witness box.

He described Armand as a gentleman in every sense of the word, and a man of admirable disinterestedness. He admitted, however, the few solemn words he had

spoken to Mme. Bernays after the arrest of the accused: "Since he is not your lover, I am afraid——" "I too." But he declared that in saying "he has deceived us all" he was only reproaching Armand with having continued to maintain that Léon was still in America. (He evidently meant that he did not believe Armand to have been implicated in the crime, but simply to have endeavoured by his chivalrous lies to make an alibi for his brother.)

Then M. Delvaux praised Mme. Bernays as a model mother, and the purest woman he knew: "incapable of turning aside from the path of duty, a victim of the mean calumnies of the anti-Liberal Press, calumnies in which her husband himself did not believe."

The President interfered to stop M. Delvaux from "pleading," and from attacking evidence that had been given under oath. He then sent away the witness in spite of the protests of the Defence, saying: "I have already allowed you to plead too much!"

A sensation greeted the advent of the tall white-bearded old man, with mournful eyes, Edouard Pecher, the father of Mme. Bernays, and father-in-law of the victim. His first words expressed a bitterness long held in check. He was obviously a Liberal of the old school, pedantic and a little dogmatic, but with the courage of his convictions and a fine dignity of bearing.

He regretted having, against his wife's advice, consented to his daughter's marriage with a man of

entirely different mentality and education. " Education, character and outlook are questions of heredity."

" Bernays is dead, and I do not want my grandson, who is very dear to me, to have to read one day evidence that I have given against his father, but I have a right to say that my poor daughter suffered martyrdom at his hands for nine years. They—let me say they—sought to alienate her own child from her, and to bring him up in principles diametrically opposed to his mother's; a saint, a true sister of mercy, as she has been called."

Gently the President reminded the sorrowing father that he had said he did not wish to blacken the memory of his son-in-law, and asked him to talk about the divorce at one time considered. M. Pecher said that it was he who had suggested this course. He spoke of the plot against his daughter's reason, the work of Amélie Pfister, who had tried to send her mad and drive her from her own house by telling her ghost stories. " The servants even went to the length of arranging a tapestry curtain so that it would fall at her feet. Then they would say, ' Another bad omen for you, Madame ! ' For two days and nights I had the house watched by detectives."

" Did you discover anything ? "

" Nothing—as I had foreseen; as I had said to my daughter, for the supernatural is not of this world—it only exists for the superstitious."

The witness grew heated. The President tried to calm him, but he proceeded to inveigh against the errors

in the indictment. When M. Demeure protested, M. Lejeune exclaimed :

" If the father may not defend his own daughter, who may ? "

" But," said the President, " Mme. Bernays has not been accused."

" Oh, yes, she has—the charge implied it," retorted the venerable witness.

" You may go, M. Pecher."

But the politician in Mme. Bernays' father had still something on his mind.

" A wrong has been done to me and my family. It is partly a question of politics ; my rivals have got hold of this business and are using it to discredit me. What reparation is to be made ? Our only consolation would have been to know that our misfortune had served the cause of humanity."

The President would hear no more, and the father-in-law of the victim went away—a melancholy figure.

Nobody had learnt anything they did not know before, but it was as if the ghost of a family disaster had passed through the Court.

The evidence of the big Liège traders was heard with less attention. On the very eve of Armand's arrest they had been about to make him manager of their transport undertaking on the Meuse. They affirmed that the mind of this remarkable uncertificated engineer had seemed to be concentrated on the business in hand, and there had been

nothing to suggest that he was hiding a guilty secret. They had all been grateful to M. Louis Lemmé for his good judgment in recommending such an able man.

Then came another witness; a man of business, M. Otlet. He suggested that Murray actually existed in flesh and blood. The public, who had disbelieved in Murray from the very first day, greeted with incredulous mirth the words of M. Otlet, who, to the obvious surprise of Léon himself, declared that he had met, years ago, a man called David Murray, who more or less resembled the Murray of the Defence, and who never signed his name twice alike.

" You have tried, in good faith, to render a service to justice," said M. Van Maldeghem, " but in your David the accused themselves would not recognise their Henry Murray." Annoyed protest from the Defence, who would have liked to make a detailed comparison of everything known of the two Murrays. The President declared, however, that this information was not serious evidence. " You can make your comparisons and you can adapt them to suit your purpose, but they will be of no more value than the letter signed ' Murray,' that appeared the other day in a daily paper, and which, as you agree, was simply a cruel hoax."

The Court had again to listen to panegyrics of Armand Peltzer from the engineers Leo Gérard of Liège, Adolphe Greiner, of Seraing and Bernard of Antwerp; brilliant intellect, singular probity, excellent heart; a sufficiently

brutal frankness to do away with all suspicion of hypocrisy. When one day he had been advised to marry again, Armand had replied: " No decent man who has a child should ever give her a stepmother. Mme. Bernays, who looks after her like a sister, one day presented to me a lady whom she wanted me to marry; I refused."

He had never ceased, every year, to lay flowers on the grave of his wife (here Armand wept silently). On the 31st of December, when, according to the Prosecution, he was planning a frightful crime, he was at the Engineers' Club, canvassing energetically for his candidature for the position of Secretary of the Club. When he heard of the discovery of Bernays' corpse, there were tears in his eyes as he spoke of this " sad accident."

The list of witnesses for the Defence was exhausted. The supreme phase of the trial was to begin next day: the speech for the Crown, the Pleading and the double reply—a battle of the giants of oratory, as it was later called, which was to last for ten days.

CHAPTER XV

The crowd that assembled outside the old Palais de Justice in the hope of getting in to hear the speech for the Crown was bigger than ever. Some of those who had tickets for the reserved portion cynically held them up for auction. So successful were they that certain places were bought at the price of a first box at the Opera on the night of a Royal Gala.

A death-like hush hovered over the exordium of M. Van Maldeghem's formidable speech. Armand listened intently, and to hide his emotion kept his back almost constantly turned to the *Avocat-général*, and took feverish notes, which he passed to his lawyer, while Léon too scribbled hard.

The speech, a work of art, repeated much that the reader already knows. I will try to indicate the general trend of the matter and the most original arguments.

The *Avocat-général* began with a pious tribute to the memory of the unhappy victim, so maligned by certain of the witnesses that it might have been he who was the accused. "It is for me to defend his memory, outraged and disowned by all; to ask for reparation, for justice, the right of every human soul. Have we not

seen his widow, insensible, tearless, barely consenting to throw the alms of an icy pardon on the trampled grave of the father of her child?"

It was the first, and last, and moreover rather unjust censure that the *Avocat-général* let fall on Mme. Bernays. Later he was to change his tone entirely in speaking of her. Meanwhile he agreed that she could not have lived happily with her husband, for he and she had nothing in common.

Then, turning without further preliminaries to the crime, he spoke of the letter from Bâle, written by Léon, that "odious hypocrite," with the help of Armand, the "sinister comedian"—a letter so cunning in its villainy that it had turned the course of justice towards the theory of accident.

Accident! Léon had aimed and struck from behind at the nape of the neck; it was in his South American adventures that he had learnt this unfailing method of slaying man or beast, the method used on the Pampas!

The letter to the coroner found at 159 rue de la Loi, M. Van Maldeghem declared, was written not *after* the death of Bernays, but *before* that long-premeditated murder. A neighbour of the house in the rue de la Loi had heard "Vaughan" pacing up and down the room where the murder was planned to take place, almost the whole of the night of the 6th of January. It was during this night that he perfected the smallest details. From the moment of the murder until the time when, the deed

done, Léon found himself at the station on his way to Aix-la-Chapelle, scarcely an hour had elapsed. It would have been a physical impossibility for him to have done in this brief space of time everything that he declared he had done. Everything or nearly everything had been got ready during that night of sinister preparation. But who was the real author of the amazing fiction of Henry Vaughan? It was Armand—Armand who would reap the benefit of the crime—Armand, an even more consummate hypocrite than his brother. Listen to this unpublished letter which, on the 9th of January, he wrote to his brother James, after (as he had been forced to admit) Léon had revealed to him at Maestricht the tragic death of Bernays.

"I have just learnt that since the day before yesterday Bernays has been missing from home. He has disappeared, no one knows why. It is a very mysterious business. Perhaps he will come back after all."

The advocate took a step towards Armand and pointed at him. "Sinister comedian," he repeated, and his eyes flashed. The accused turned away his face.

"Armand Peltzer is proud, and he is vindictive. He had been humiliated, and banished from the Bernays' house, and he thirsted for revenge. Moreover, he was in love, and the frenzy of his passion drove him to get rid of the husband that stood in the way. It was not hatred alone that drove you to kill Bernays, but your burning desire to possess his wife. For this you availed yourself

of Léon's aid, for you knew he would be a willing tool in your hand. Twice you had saved him, this disreputable brother of yours, at the expense of your own future, in Antwerp in 1873, and again in Manchester in 1877. He owed you everything. A wanderer on the face of the earth, a very gallows bird, he would not refuse you anything, even the blood of your enemy. With the cunning of the damned you disguised him. You created Vaughan, that the law might never find the true murderer, and that you might go to the woman you coveted, who, little though she cared for her husband, would have shrunk in horror from your hand steeped in his blood!"

Several times M. Van Maldeghem dwelt on his last idea, as though once and for all to put an end to malicious gossip. "Although very fond of Armand, Mme. Bernays never on that account forgot her duty as the legal wife of another." "There was," he declared, "nothing of any value in the servants' evidence except part of the information given by Amélie Pfister, of whom the diplomatic representative of Belgium in Switzerland had given a good report."

Alluding to the sitting *in camera*, when Mme. Bernays' doctor had been questioned, he let it be understood that "the most definite accusations brought against her by the servants had been finally and unquestionably disproved."

After having described in detail the complex structure of lies erected by Armand to carry out the crime, and to

ensure his immunity from the consequences, the *Avocat-général* then proceeded to take it to pieces, bit by bit. In referring to the faked letters, addressed by Armand to his brother in America, he exclaimed: "What liars scraps of paper can be!"

On the subject of the mysterious yellow trunk the *Avocat-général* said: "It contained evidence which has disappeared with it on the 22nd of January, as soon as the story of the 'accidental death' of Bernays was known to be false. If it merely contained secrets of another man's love affairs, why has he not come forward long ago to confess it here, and save his too generous friend? Simply because he does not exist, any more than Murray exists."

Then a letter was read from Robert Peltzer, written to Armand after the discovery of the corpse. "This Bernays affair is a grim business. So Julie is free now. I hope to heaven you will not take it into your head to marry her."

"Again the motive of the crime. His own brother knows what Armand will gain from the death of the husband, though he does not know that he is the murderer. His own brother, and his own mother: 'My sons, murderers—for that woman.'"

Interrupted by ironical cheers or outbursts of indignation from the audience, the *Avocat-général* read Armand's letter to Bernays, written after he had been banished from the house of the woman he loved, in which

he consented to swallow his pride and return. Blaming Armand far more than Léon, M. Van Maldeghem accused him of having tried at that time to bring about a divorce. Husband and wife having finally refused this solution, he had then thought of getting rid of Bernays in a duel. Having failed in this attempt also, he made a last effort, on the 24th of November, to mend the breach, by giving Bernays a book he required for his historical work. When this too had failed he became desperate, and decided to play his last card for the possession of Mme. Bernays—murder—the diabolical scheming of which had just been laid bare.

To emphasise his extraordinary powers of dissimulation, the Counsel for the Crown recalled the audacity with which the " sinister comedian," more than a month after the crime, had written an indignant letter to the papers, insisting on the innocence of his brother Léon, announcing his imminent return from America, and informing his calumniators of the tranquillity of his own conscience.

One of the few mistakes in the speech for the Crown—I can vouch for it, after all that time has revealed to me—was the manner in which the *Avocat-général* looked upon the part played by money in the crime. He made allusion to three of the telegrams imputed to Léon (telegrams asking for " good treatment," for " the contemplated documents," and " papers as convincing as possible "), and interpreted them as demands, more and more menac-

ing, for the *blood money*; thus representing Léon as a hireling who had killed for gain. No doubt this translation of the code was correct, though it is naturally arguable; but Léon was never for a moment the hired assassin demanding his wages. His almost slavish gratitude made him no more than a tool in the hands of the brother who had saved him. He asked insistently for money, only because he had nothing left, and money was absolutely necessary if he were to get back to America—necessary in Armand's interests far more than in his own, for he in any case would never be more than a wastrel and an outcast, even though he escaped punishment.

On the other hand, the *Avocat-général* confessed that he could not prove that Armand had supplied the money, except by a series of logical deductions, but deductions which were no less convincing than proofs. Since Murray did not exist, who in the world had paid the expenses of the preparation and execution of the crime if not the only man who was going to benefit by it—Armand? There had been ample time and opportunity to get rid of all compromising proofs, either in the yellow trunk or in the bonfires of papers which he was known to have made since the discovery of Bernays' corpse.

This was on the second day devoted to the speech for the Crown. It was several times interrupted. Two or three ladies fainted, overcome by the heat or by their

emotions, and had to be carried out, upon which the President Demeure requested " all those who are feeling unwell to go out, for we cannot spend our time removing hysterical women."

Then the examining magistrate produced a pair of shoes found in Armand's house, which exactly coincided with the impression made in the blood-stained carpet. The accused denied that the shoes were his. He was made to try them on, but old and stretched though they were, they hurt his feet.

The *Avocat-général* made no further attempt to prove that Armand had been present either at the time of the murder or subsequently, to alter the position of the corpse. For him this remained a mystery never to be solved. It was more than enough that Armand had arranged and planned the murder, and of that there was no possible shadow of doubt.

M. Van Maldeghem turned to Léon: " Do you still maintain that Henry Murray commissioned you to launch an interoceanic enterprise involving twelve and a half million francs—you, the ex-bankrupt, an adventurer, a paltry traveller in petticoats and corsets? Yes? Well, no one in the world is going to believe you." (Applause.) " Neither will you persuade anyone that when you had come to Paris to meet both Murray and your brother, who disapproved of the venture, you allowed Murray to leave Paris for Bordeaux the day before the arrival of your brother, and let your brother go back to Antwerp before

the return of Murray, when a discussion between the three of you was the only way to clear the matter up.

" And then, among all the competent lawyers in Antwerp, what in the world made you light upon Bernays, the mortal enemy of your brother, the man you did not dare to face without a disguise? You chose Bernays because it was not a lawyer you were seeking, but your brother's enemy, the husband of the woman he desired, the obstacle to be removed, cost what it might.

" Oh, it was carefully planned to the very day and hour; on the 1st of January, 1882, you were in Aix-la-Chapelle and, on leaving that day, you told the manager of the hotel that you would come back about the 7th to fetch your trunk and various belongings. And late in the afternoon of the 7th you came sneaking back to Aix, your hands carefully washed of the blood you had spilt that day. From the 1st of January then, the date, the minute of the crime, was decided in your mind! "

The *Avocat-général* then defended the conclusion of the experts in handwriting against the contradictory statements of the graphologist Varinard. He recognised the failure of the medical experts to prove the nature of the impression in the blood on the carpet (foot or knee). Then, after having poured scorn on the improbable arguments of the Defence, who had gone to the length of inventing a Murray in petticoats (Marie S.), he ended by describing to the jury the actual scene of the murder.

" You, Léon, alias Vaughan, were feverishly anxious

for the arrival of Bernays, you turned away a workman who might have been an awkward witness, and at 10.40 a.m. you yourself went downstairs to open the door to your guest, whose arrival you had watched from your window. In the well-furnished hall you relieved the doomed man of his overcoat, the collar of which would prevent you from seeing the back of his head.

" ' It is miserable weather to-day,' you remarked to him.

" ' It is indeed,' replied Bernays, ' though it was fine when I left Antwerp.'

" And—as we have learnt at the examination—you had the nerve to say, as you grasped the revolver in your hand : ' When you leave, I will lend you my umbrella.' " (Murmurs of horror from the audience.) " The unhappy man was never to leave the house. You made him walk in front of you. He went upstairs, and, at the moment he passed through the doorway into your study, you fired your revolver at the back of his head, at the vital spot—you had killed the man who stood in your brother's way, who kept him from the house of his love, of his desire. Your victim fell headlong at the corner of the bureau, and sank to the floor. Bernays, I believe, never knew who it was that killed him. Ah ! had he guessed, had there been time, what horror would have filled the last seconds of his life, while you made your escape as one pursued by the furies, fled from the house of blood and treachery where your brother had planned the murder

trap! I have finished—I have proved the crime and its motive. Gentlemen of the jury, you represent the justice of a noble nation, I have no fears as to your verdict."

Throughout the speech, composed mainly of details pieced together, the *Avocat-général* had not once tried for big effects of oratory; but his final evocation of the awful scene of the murder produced an impression stronger than the most high-flown eloquence. "It is a living picture of the death," whispered a well-known writer.

CHAPTER XVI

On the 14th of December began the first speech for the Defence, made by Armand's Counsel, which was to last as long as the speech for the Crown. M. Edmond Picard, nicknamed "Our uncle the jurisconsult," was at that time near the height of his fame as a lawyer, at once learned and passionate, and a brilliant dialectician.

He began, courageously, by a protest against the unwarrantable interference of the public, the "ignorant crowd," in this serious trial. "The day before yesterday, when Armand Peltzer said that the shoes which had been tried on him were not his, this simple statement was received with exclamations of disbelief. People's minds are so prejudiced against the accused that he cannot open his mouth but the humblest crossing-sweeper calls him a liar. No doubt they would like to take matters into their own hands and hold a trial of their own in the public square, a trial where they, blinded by prejudice, ignorance and political feeling, would themselves be judge, jury and executioner. Surrounded by this ungoverned fury of ill-will, the accused are like flotsam tossed on the swelling sea of public opinion. Outside our case is looked on as a party question, within the Court it is

looked on as a fairy-tale. We would ask you to look upon it as a matter of justice ! "

Then M. Picard sketched his line of reply to the indictment. He would agree, to some extent, with the Prosecution, since they had decided to abandon the idea of a guilty liaison between Armand and Mme. Bernays. But he would go further. If there had been no adultery, if Armand had been given no proof that his passion was shared, the crime imputed to the accused became " an effect without a cause." No man of superior intelligence, such as Armand, would have gone to the point of murder to gain the hand of a woman who, so far from returning his feelings, had urged him to marry one of her friends. Mme. Bernays had never been for Armand more than a dear friend who admired him for his devotion to his brothers, and had been kind to his little motherless daughter. The chastity of this friendship was guaranteed not only by her character but by her physical condition. For the evidence heard *in camera* had proved that if adultery was not impossible, it was at any rate dangerous." (*Sensation.*)

M. Picard, in whom could already be discerned the anti-Semite, the future author of " Jericho," placed opposite the gracious portrait of Mme. Bernays an unflattering sketch of her husband, " the avaricious Jew lawyer, whose religion and philosophy changed at the dictates of his material advantage, who had quarrelled with his father-in-law, not, as had been alleged, for

reasons of sentiment, but because that influential politician refused to abuse his credit as leader of the Liberal party to obtain for his chameleon son-in-law the Cross of the Order of Leopold, or the rank of Captain of the Civic Guard.

" Moreover, was it not well known that this husband, unable for the best of reasons to live with his wife, sought compensation elsewhere? From 1875 he would have deserted his wife and child, and run away with the beautiful servant-girl, Marie-Thérèse—but she refused. He was not so unfortunate as was supposed. If his life with his wife was painful, it was not the intolerable hell it was said to be. Mme. Bernays in the interests of her child had rejected the idea of divorce; was she opposed in this by Armand? No, on the contrary—another proof of the innocence of M. Peltzer—and who can believe that one who had twice saved his brother from ruin and disgrace, who had stuck by him through thick and thin, would have armed this same brother for a horrible crime, at the very moment when he was beginning to live down his past in America? What madness to suppose that he had so patiently helped and advised his brother through long years of misfortune and disgrace, only in the end to make him a murderer!

" Armand adored his daughter, and he has seen to it that she is still unaware of what has happened to her father. Do you suggest that this model father, this widower who has never ceased to mourn the death of

his young wife, has staked in this abominable crime all the future happiness of his child? And all to marry a woman who has for him no other thought than that of friendship, who has been a sister to him, and whom, indeed, he could never marry without endangering her life!

"The cable from Léon to Armand—'Robert Fulton'—no more than two conventional words chosen for economy's sake, signifies, you say, 'I will come and rid you of Bernays.' It is, you declare, a reply to a letter from Armand calling him to perform this hideous task. Where then is this letter? You have never produced it. You have 'supposed' it as you 'suppose' so many things. But you cannot condemn a man on suppositions, and your indictment and the speech for the Crown are nothing else.

"In 1880–81 Armand was very badly off, having permanently encumbered his fortune for the sake of his brothers. The payment of his rent and taxes was constantly in arrears, and he was forced to pawn his deceased wife's jewels. Where could he have obtained the 15,000 francs of which you have found no trace in his books, though you have been hunting through them for six months? In 1882 life smiled on him. He was to be offered an excellent position as director of a big Liège coal transport concern. Would he choose that very moment in which to risk his life and his honour, and to trail his proud name in the dust? You have

quoted the words of a mother: 'My two sons—murderers!' Is it not monstrous to take the involuntary cry of a mother, and bring it as evidence against her own sons? And is it not well known that Mme. Peltzer, like her other son, Robert, is an irresponsible and neurotic woman, as little answerable for her words, sometimes, as a somnambulist?"

Several times the eminent lawyer was interrupted by murmurs of disapproval, and more than once he addressed his hearers with bitter scorn, and not without reason.

"Grumble then, cry me down, pack of ignorant fools! Who do you think cares for your spiteful gabbling and your public-house opinions? Who made you the judges?"

M. Picard then went into the scandalous evidence of the domestic staff, and especially that of Amélie Pfister. Another servant who had only been eleven days with the Bernays had joined with the slanderers, simply overborne by these vixens, one or two of whom were clearly doing their best to break up the home and take their mistress's place with her husband. Bernays placed so little credence in his wife's alleged relations with Armand that he wrote to Julie, who was at Ostend, during the fête of the fiftieth anniversary of National Independence (1880): "Armand has been in to dinner every day this week. I went to Brussels with him yesterday to see the cavalcade, which is magnificent, and where I hope to take Endé."

"The servants have denounced the *daily* correspond-

ence and the daily private conversations of Armand and Mme. Bernays. Why should they want to write to one another every day, when every day, several times a day, they meet? Our wives, our sisters, our nieces are all at the mercy of servants' gossip."

At this point occurred a fresh incident by which many were touched, but which others thought theatrical and simply got up for effect.

M. Picard wanted to read the pathetic letters of the little Mariette to her father before he passed on to answer an objection of the President's, but Armand leaned towards him and whispered a few words in his ear. The great lawyer appeared to hesitate, and then in a voice that trembled he said:

"I may not read them! The accused has just told me that he does not want the letters of his dear little one mixed up in the records of such a tragedy. Those who, like myself, have had, and lost, children will understand."

And M. Picard wept, and even sobbed aloud, while tears coursed down Armand's cheeks.

The audience was softened at the sight; for a moment it was troubled. This time the emotion of the "sinister comedian" seemed to be real. Perhaps indeed there was remorse in the father's grief.

But M. Picard recovered, and accused the Prosecution of melodrama, when on the evidence of cooks and chambermaids they used the hysterical words of a mother, and a

phrase of a brother's letter, to transform on a sudden a man, whose past showed nothing but generosity, self-sacrifice and honest hard work, into a murderer. "You have stated that the accused at one time tried to get rid of Bernays in a duel; he would have refused to contemplate it for a moment, for the lady whom he respected would have been compromised. The steps taken by his brothers Robert and James had no object but conciliation and explanation; moreover, the husband was not an insurmountable obstacle between Armand and Mme. Bernays. It would have been fairly easy to return to the idea of divorce, so often considered before; and if the relations between Mme. Bernays and her friend were guilty, they could quite easily meet elsewhere than in Bernays' house. Where was the necessity for a dastardly crime, with all its terrible risks? There are in this case many coincidences which give an appearance of guilt. Innocent men have been condemned on the strength of coincidence. Some years ago, three pedlars passing through a village asked the *curé* for a night's shelter, and were taken in. In the morning, so as not to make a noise, they went out by the window. Some hours after, three men murdered the servant of the *curé*. The pedlars were condemned and executed on account of this coincidence. They were innocent; the undeniable proof only came out later—too late. You dare not condemn Armand Peltzer on the strength of coincidence."

CHAPTER XVII

After this vehement and by no means unskilful speech, M. Eugène Robert, Léon's Counsel, rose. He had built up a reputation for finished oratory, and was known to possess a caustic wit. It was not his method to make men weep—he sometimes made them laugh.

" So Léon Peltzer has committed murder, plotted and killed by order of his eldest brother. This is a strange resurrection of the rights of the first-born, and surely the rôles are reversed? You would have us see Léon as a confirmed cut-throat, and yet this is the vagabond who has voluntarily offered himself on the altar of family love? No, no, the real martyr is Armand. It was he who, learning too late of his brother's predicament, lied, compromised himself, and drew the suspicion upon himself to try to avert it from Léon. For he was well aware that no one who had heard of Léon's unlucky past would believe the truth—that truth which the Prosecution calls ' the Murray fiction.'

" Léon is a gambler, a speculator; hence his former crashes in Antwerp, Manchester and Buenos Aires. All his life he has run after mirages and chimera. Murray showed him the chimera of a profitable enterprise. He

swallowed the bait eagerly, thinking he saw fortune and a return to a life of respectability and ease at the end. In Paris, his brother tried to dissuade him from going on with this wild-goose chase, and he yielded in spite of the fact that he was under an obligation to Murray, who had supplied the funds for his voyage to Europe. You ask why he went to Bernays for legal advice, and was thus obliged to disguise himself as Vaughan for the interview, well knowing that Bernays would never give his serious consideration to a business negotiated by him? Because Bernays, of all the lawyers in Antwerp, was the best qualified in this particular kind of business, and, moreover, he was in a position to interest M. Pecher, with all his enormous influence, in this interoceanic affair, which badly needed solid support in Antwerp. Why, when Murray knows his representative to be compromised in this appalling situation, does he not come forward and confirm his statements? The accused is firmly convinced that Murray is simply one of those buccaneers of finance who launch fictitious businesses so as to get a substantial commission, and then disappear. He has too much to fear from the law to expose himself voluntarily to its inquiries. Moreover, I would point out that it is not our job to prove that Murray exists—it is yours to prove that he does not! And towards this you have done nothing, or very little. In Paris you hunted round fifty hair-dressers to discover a witness for the Crown. You have simply made a pretence of looking for this

witness, indispensable for the Defence. You have even done everything in your power to ensure that he shall not be found. You have seen to that by the form of your request to the foreign police. You have practically said, 'Do you know anything of one "Murray" whom the Belgian Parquet believes to be a myth?' Naturally the foreign police have no wish to offend their Belgian friends. They can but comply; so they send back the answer, 'Murray unknown,' a reply of pure courtesy, which you have almost demanded."

M. Robert then produced an American directory giving residents of the name of Murray in several towns, especially in St. Louis and Detroit, precisely where Léon declared he met the charlatan for the first time. "The examination has neglected all these indications; there are hundreds of Murrays all over the world—the Prosecution cannot find one!

"If the Interoceanic Company was no more than an invention, why on earth should Vaughan, alias Léon, take the trouble to consult on the subject so many lawyers, in Bremen, Hamburg and Amsterdam? It was surely a trifle complicated to increase to that extent the costly preparations for a crime which, according to you, was a matter of such urgency. You have heard the witnesses for the Prosecution declare that in Paris Vaughan appeared to be in the best possible humour, and even gave a paint-box to the hotel manager's little boy. It has been affirmed that he was calm and light-hearted at the Hôtel

Britannique, where, on the 6th of January, he even ordered a bottle of champagne. Is this the attitude of an assassin on the eve of murder? Léon simply wanted to consult Bernays on the subject of an undertaking in which he himself firmly believed. Bernays recognised him, insulted and threatened him. Léon lost his head, and seizing his revolver on the spur of the moment, fired, not point-blank at the vital spot, but at random from more than a yard away. Your experts have contradicted each other too often to be able to disprove this version. Indeed the whole case for the Crown is rotten with contradictions, which devour each other like the two dogs of the fable, who fought so long that in the end nothing was left but two tails. In New York, Léon, these last few years, had led an exemplary life. He was expiating his past errors. Is it possible that he would choose such a time to cross the ocean and connive with his brother in the scheming of an atrocious crime?

"If the murder was planned and thought out, how do you explain the fact that in the morning, one or two hours before it was accomplished, Léon had told his landlord and neighbour that he was expecting a visit from an Antwerp lawyer, and that he said the same thing to a workman, whom he sent away on account of his visitor? This was giving himself away beforehand. And what becomes of the legend of the complicity of the two brothers before these two facts? On that terrible night of the 4th of March, when Léon had wrongly interpreted

one of his brother's telegrams, and had arrived at the station in Brussels, what were Armand's words? He said: 'Here, take this money, and go and buy a pistol and shoot yourself.' After their double arrest, when they were confronted, unprepared, what did Armand exclaim? 'Miserable wretch!' Had it been a case of concerted crime, surely the younger brother would have replied in disgust: 'Go and shoot yourself, it was for your sake I did it!' and on the 9th March: 'Wretch yourself, you who forced me into this crime!' Instead, Léon bowed his head and sighed: 'My poor brother!' Had there been complicity, you would have seen the accomplices denouncing each other, not both vouching for the truth of the other's words.

"If Armand knew nothing of the crime until the 8th of January at Maestricht, then Léon did not commit murder intentionally, for what interest had he in getting rid of Bernays? That is how the matter stands. The only single proof you have of Armand's complicity is the alleged telegram from Léon of the 5th January, signed 'Marie,' a telegram which we absolutely refuse to recognise as coming from him. There is in your indictment an enormous gap which swallows up all your evidence. You have no proof of communication between the two brothers except this telegram of the 5th of January, during the long space of time from the 14th of November, the day on which Armand left Paris, to the 7th of January, the day of the tragedy in the rue de la

Loi. Léon, therefore, acted on his own during all that time, without a word of advice from his brother, who thought he had returned to America after having given up the Murray project, and who knew nothing of the death of Bernays until after it had taken place. Thus the whole charge, built up on the combined plotting of the two brothers, crumbles to pieces before your eyes."

After M. Eugène Robert, M. Van Calster, a member of the Bar in Antwerp, gave evidence as a personal friend of Armand. He had no new arguments, but made one or two convincing statements, showing how ill-founded were some of the accusations.

For example, the gardener, Frédéric Bael, had presented himself to the judge, saying: "Here is a shirt which Mme. Bernays gave me one day; it is marked with the initials A.P. What do you make of that?" Now Mme. Bernays was questioned, and it turned out that she often used to ask her friends for old clothes and cast-off underwear for her many poor protégés. It was thus that she came to give an old shirt of Peltzer's to Frédéric Bael, who had used it as a proof of his revolting insinuations.

On the question of the financing of the crime the report of the accountants, which had cost the nation 20,000 francs, had not been able to prove that a single sou of money spent on preparation had come out of Armand's pocket; and Mme. Bernays' personal accounts had been

subjected to the same humiliating examination with the same negative results.

It was on the 20th of December that the fourth Counsel for the Defence, the brilliant and distinguished Jules Lejeune, future Minister of Justice, rose to plead, and made a speech which lasted far into the night. He concentrated almost entirely on discrediting the decisions of the experts on handwriting. "Two thousand years ago such things were believed in. To-day we no longer go in for that kind of thing. The famous La Roncière case, where the experts were unanimous in their opinions, and were entirely wrong, was their Waterloo. When the experts come here and swear that such and such a telegram or letter is in Armand's or Léon's handwriting, we may be sure that it belongs neither to one nor the other. Unlike the medical experts, these gentlemen are all in agreement—in such absolute agreement that it becomes absurd.

"The audience laughs, but it is not for their amusement that I am speaking, it is to bring the jury to understand how vain is the evidence of experts—the *only* evidence which has been found against Armand, and which makes Léon appear a murderer in cold blood."

To this "Plea in four acts," as he called it, M. Van Maldeghem replied briefly, under the flickering light of the oil-lamps.

He reproached the Defence with having converted two criminals into heroes and martyrs, and accused them of

dragging the name of the murdered man in the mud to save his murderers from punishment. "The man who, blindly in love with Mme. Bernays, turned his brother's revolver on her husband had excited the apprehensions of M. Pecher himself, who had advised his daughter to keep this passionate admirer at a distance.

"There was, among the circumstantial evidence, a lock of Mme. Bernays' hair which Armand had one day cut off when she was not looking, and which had been discovered in the attic of his house. He had not been able to bring himself to part with it even when he was under suspicion and knew he was watched.

"There is no question of Mme. Bernays' integrity. She is a good woman who, in the interests of her child, refused to contemplate divorce. For Armand, who desired her madly, there was no other way open but to kill the husband. To speak of clandestine meetings with Peltzer in other people's houses is to insult this lady, who has come out of this trial with unstained honour.

"The four distinguished members of the Bar ranged on the side of the defence think they can silence me when they say, 'A man who has done everything to save his brother from dishonour could not possibly have incited him to murder! But Armand had helped his brother chiefly through pride—pride of his name, and when, to satisfy his passion, he had need of an assassin it was to this scapegrace brother that he naturally turned. This 'Murray' invented for the

occasion is but another incarnation of Vautrin, who called himself Vaughan, Prelat, Louis Mario, Lefebure, etc. The only Murray who has been mentioned in Court, the *David Murray* of M. Otlet, has been traced. Unluckily for you, he died several years ago. He was, moreover, an honest man who had nothing to fear, while your Murray is apparently a crook hiding from justice."

After passing in review all the various "improbabilities" that made up the case for the Defence, the *Avocat-général* referred to M. Lejeune's tirade against the experts as "a witty speech, worthy of Coquelin on the Dynasty of Brard and Saint-Omer, a charming speech, but hardly to the point."

"You would argue from the apparent coolness of the accused in the most hideous moments of the execution of their crime. Well, Léon has killed a man, he does not deny it, and how often during this trial, so terrible for him, have you seen a smile pass over his lips? While as for that 'sinister comedian,' Armand, on the 9th of February, when the examining magistrate questioned him on the tragedy of which he swore he knew no more than a babe unborn, he showed a front of unflinching self-composure. He has since acknowledged that he knew all about it on the 8th of January, when Léon had confessed everything to him at Maestricht. There is no lack of precedent in classical tragedy for the black-hearted assassin, who yet can face the world with an unblushing air of innocence. You allude to an alleged

chronological gap in the evidence. The yellow trunk, and all the papers which Armand has reduced to cinders, are more than enough to account for that. As for the story of involuntary homicide: after your arrest, Léon, you wrote to your mother, begging her to come and see you in prison, 'although,' you said, 'I am no more worthy to be called your son.' Are those the words of one who has killed a man *by accident?*

" Gentlemen of the Jury, they have tried to work upon your sympathy by talking to you of a mother's despair and the future of an innocent child. The murder also took a father from his child and a son from his old parents. Listen to the voice of your conscience, Gentlemen of the Jury, and you will punish this crime, you will perform your duty as the chosen servants of national justice."

The public applauded till they were tired. They, at any rate, had never wavered in their conviction of the guilt of the two brothers.

CHAPTER XVIII

The day of the final speech for the Defence, and of the verdict, had come at last, the 22nd of December. From the beginning it had been necessary to put up barriers before the Palais de Justice to keep back the crowd. To-day the mob all but broke through the frail ramparts. At half-past nine, when the Court had assembled, many notable personages were to be seen among the audience: senators, diplomats, the Count de Lannoy, Grand-Maître of the household of Queen Marie-Henriette, the lawyer Frédéric Delvaux and many others.

The two accused, especially Armand, were pale and over-wrought. They listened avidly to the final words of M. Picard and M. Lejeune. (It had been decided that the fifth Counsel for the Defence, M. Schoenfeld, who had constantly assisted his colleagues throughout the trial, should refrain from adding to what had already been said.)

M. Picard began by an attack on the weathercock opinions of the *Avocat-général*. In the beginning he had been sceptical about the virtue of Mme. Bernays. To-day he rightly acknowledged it to be without stain. He had been mistaken in this, and no doubt he had made

other mistakes no less important. Sometimes he represented Armand summoning his brother from America at the end of September, then again he gave it to be understood that the plot was only decided upon much later, and that, on the 27th of November, Armand was still trying to bring about a reconciliation with Bernays by sending him a present of a valuable book. This vagueness betrayed uncertainty: "you must be certain before you condemn."

The very fact that the two accused corresponded by telegrams proved that there was no collusion between them: "one does not discuss plans for murder by wire, for it is common knowledge that telegraph forms can be traced."

M. Picard went back over a whole collection of small details in order to destroy the significance attributed to them by the Prosecution. The wig had been delivered to Léon by Daumouche on the 26th of November, seven days after Armand had left for Antwerp; therefore Armand had nothing to do with the disguise. "You suggest that the two brothers plotted a complicated murder in a hotel bedroom, where the partitions are so thin and speech is so liable to be overheard! Come, come!—The trial pistol shot that Armand fired in his own house? It has a very simple explanation, for it was simply to intimidate possible burglars, and perhaps to amuse the little Mariette.—You have found no trace of a single pecuniary transaction between the brothers;

therefore the words 'document' and 'papers' in the telegrams did not signify 'money.'" Several times the distinguished lawyer addressed the *Avocat-général*: "Answer me this? What have you to say to that?"

"I have said all I have to say," replied M. Van Maldeghem; "as you have the right to the last word, you might go on replying to my answers till doomsday, and this trial would never end!"

"As regards the yellow trunk," went on M. Picard, "Armand has never made a mystery of it. It was taken in and out of his house in full view of everyone, and in broad daylight. . . . The lock of hair, cut off by surprise? How he must have treasured it, since he kept it in the attic! Moreover, it has been discovered that it was not Armand, but his little daughter, who one day cut it off for fun."

M. Picard again angrily addressed the audience, which was constantly interrupting, and then he attacked the medical experts for the Crown.

From midday until 1.20 p.m. the hearing was suspended. The public of both sexes, having made up their minds not to move until the trial was over, began to eat their lunch where they sat, and the Court of Assize soon began to look like a refreshment-room.

When the hearing recommenced, M. Picard, in reference to the financial question, maintained that, since Armand had not supplied the money, it must have come from Murray, *unless Léon stole it*—you say he is capable

of anything!" (*Here the usher Guyot carried out a fainting lady.*) Armand's Counsel then rose, and in spite of the impatience of the audience, practically repeated his first speech.

Then suddenly there occurs one of the most fantastic scenes of this fantastic trial. The indefatigable lawyer leaves his place, and from the table where the circumstantial evidence lies he picks up the gaping skull of Bernays. Is he about to soliloquise like Hamlet on the skull of Yorick? No, he is going to act the scene of the death of Bernays according to Léon's version. Imperiously he beckons Victor Guyot, the usher, to stand about a yard away from him, representing the murderer; the respective heights of M. Picard and the imposing silver-chained functionary correspond to those of the victim and "Vaughan."

"Oh, I know you, you are Léon! Scoundrel! Ex-bankrupt! You have inveigled me into a trap! I shall go and inform the police at once. Let me pass!"

"No, Bernays, listen, let me explain!"

"Get out of my way, wretch!"

And then the great lawyer, taking the rôle of Léon, seizes the revolver and fires, *in front*, not behind Bernays, giving the fatal bullet a very different direction from that attributed to it by the experts.

A murmur of horror sweeps through the hall.

The *Avocat-général* rises in his seat to get a better view, and thus hides the scene from some of the audience.

"Sit down!" cry the spectators, who are evidently convinced they are at a theatre. The President threatens to expel them.

Returning to his place, M. Picard forgot the skull, which was left lying on the front bench of the jury. One of them edged away in disgust from this gruesome relic, and the usher had to go and fetch it back to its place on the table. The public was wild with excitement.

"Ah, the ignoble crowd!" exclaimed Armand's Counsel.

The President invited him to continue his speech.

"I have finished!" declared M. Picard, to the general satisfaction.

This dramatic dialogue was then a counterblast to the speech of M. Van Maldeghem, whose object was, by a living picture of the crime, the better to strike the imagination of the jury. Effect for effect!

It was now M. Lejeune's turn to speak. His speech was brief, but full of the unexpected.

"Let us admit for a moment that Armand really did say to his brother: 'Get rid of Bernays for me, kill him!' I put it to you that the law has no penalty for this. To condemn Armand there must have been direct complicity in the accomplishment of the crime. Unless Armand had abused his authority, Léon was free to disobey. There is no proof of such abuse. The Prosecution speaks of the arrogant despotism of the elder

brother, but this is an argument which cuts both ways, for surely pride of his name would have kept Peltzer from staining it with blood and dishonour."

M. Lejeune then quoted numerous commentaries on the criminal code to prove that the law cannot touch one who has simply advised, and who has aided and abetted the crime neither by abuse of authority nor by pressure of money.

The sitting was suspended about four o'clock, and news was brought in that outside an enormous crowd awaiting the final decision was being kept back with difficulty by a squadron of gendarmes, and that the Burgomaster Buls intended to come himself later in the evening to direct the police, and avert or repress possible trouble . . . in case of acquittal.

Then the pleading drew to an end in the smoky atmosphere of gas and oil lamps—a funereal scene.

M. Lejeune still pleaded the illegality of condemning Armand simply on the charge of having suggested the murder, when he had not even been guilty of such a suggestion. The Prosecution, he declared, having failed to prove a motive, had been forced back upon conjecture.

"Gentlemen of the Jury, your consciences will not allow you, on the strength of mere conjecture, to cut short the life of a man whose only condemnation lies in the sobs of a bewildered mother!"

CHAPTER XIX

It is a quarter to seven. The long trial is over at last.

"Léon Peltzer, have you anything to add in your defence?"

"No, M. le Président."

"And you, Armand Peltzer?"

"Nothing."

To the surprise of everyone, M. Frédéric Delvaux went up to Armand and whispered a few hurried words. No one will ever know what he said. The gendarmes then led the two accused into another room, while the jury, headed by their foreman, M. Godefroy, retired to their room, having listened to the questions they were to be asked.

(1) Is Léon Peltzer guilty of having in Brussels, on the 7th of January, 1882, committed wilfully, with the intention of causing death, homicide on the person of Guillaume Bernays, or of having directly co-operated therein by his presence, by practical aid, or by criminal connivance?

(2) Is Léon Peltzer guilty of having committed, with premeditation, wilful homicide on the person of Guillaume Bernays?

The same questions for Armand.

After half an hour of deliberation, the jury returned their verdict of "Guilty" on all points, Armand as well as Léon.

The audience rose to its feet and applauded till the roof rang, in spite of the President's efforts to silence them. In the neighbouring room the accused heard the deafening cheers. They realised that the verdict had at any rate delighted "the ignoble crowd." They returned to the prisoners' bar, a gendarme on either side. The lawyer M. Van Calster was weeping bitterly.

The Clerk of the Court read the answer of the jury and the President asked the condemned if they had anything to add. Léon stood up, and said in a voice that trembled:

"I confess, I am guilty. I am condemned with reason, but my brother is innocent. His condemnation is an error of justice against which I protest." (*The public hissed.*)

"You are insulting the jury," interrupted the President; "if I were not sorry for you I would make you pay for such an offence."

"I am only saying what I know to be true," replied Léon, "and I maintain it."

Armand, when asked, rose frowning, and raising an immaculately gloved hand towards the jury:

"May the curse of my little daughter fall on the jury," he exclaimed.

The audience gave vent to cries of indignation.

"This is a further offence! How dare you say such a thing!" thundered M. Demeure. "Let the Public Prosecutor now fulfil his task."

The Avocat-général (*deeply moved*): "Will it please the Court to pronounce sentence of death?"

After some moments of deliberation the Court pronounced against Armand and Léon penalty of death, to be carried out in one of the public squares in Brussels. (*The public jeered at this reference to the sham execution which has taken place in the Grand Place ever since the abolition of capital punishment in practice.*)

And now the audience flocked out into the street, in the hope of witnessing some final sensation. A loud clamour arose, calling for the death of the two condemned. The gendarmes and police were almost overwhelmed and had difficulty in protecting the prisoners from the grasp of an executioner with fifty thousand arms stretched out to claim this twofold prey.

Finally the two brothers entered the refuge of the prison van, which, under a formidable escort, brought them at a gallop to the prison of the Petits-Carmes, where, their appeal having been rejected, they awaited only their transfer to the gaol of Louvain, at that time a very tomb for the living dead.

CHAPTER XX

This is the end of the first phase of the tragedy. Its memory was often to be awakened during the first decade that followed the trial.

First there was the sudden death of one of the jury cursed by Armand Peltzer. This death, two or three days after the sentence, was naturally considered by the superstitious as a direct result of the curse, and Edmond Picard took the incident, though naturally altering the circumstances, and embodied it in a small but wildly melodramatic volume entitled *The Jury*.

The sombre drama was suddenly and vividly resuscitated eight months later by the Press campaign mentioned in the introduction, when it was declared that the mysterious Murray had actually appeared in Brussels under a pseudonym, at the time of Bernays' murder, and that it would be easy to find him again. The law did indeed trace a French ex-officer whose name was Murray, and after a long and careful inquiry, proved conclusively in the *Moniteur* that there had not been an atom of truth in the rumour identifying him with the Murray of Léon Peltzer.

The sensation caused by this incident had hardly died down when it was awakened by the announcement of

the death of Armand Peltzer in the prison at Louvain on the 10th of April, 1885, two years and four months after his condemnation.

During the first months of his captivity the elder Peltzer had sought for relief in the study of Latin authors. The prison authorities treated both him and his brother with a consideration they seemed to regard as due to criminals of superior rank. The discipline was occasionally relaxed for them, and they were allowed on certain days to read. But in spite of this distraction the physical health of Armand, reflecting his terrible mental anguish, soon declined so visibly that in March 1885 he was transferred from his cell to a bedroom where he was relatively comfortable, and could receive the attention his condition required. He was even allowed to discard his convict's uniform and wear his own old clothes again.

Informed of his brother's serious illness by Mme. Peltzer and his brother James, who visited him as often as the prison rules allowed, Léon wrote on the 3rd of April 1885 this humble but passionate petition to the King.

> " Innocently condemned, as I have ceaselessly and most solemnly declared, my brother is expiating the sacrifice which he so nobly and generously made for my sake. Crushed beneath the terrible fate which has overtaken him, at a time when he was surrounded by the affection and esteem of all, he is now dying of grief, and his condition is such that only by his pardon and release can his life be saved. Sire, have pity on my brother. By your generosity the sentence

pronounced against him was not made irrevocable; save him from the certain and even more terrible death which now awaits him! You will give him back to life, to his mother, to his daughter and to all his friends, and you will save me from the overwhelming weight of grief which will surely crush me if, in addition to my repentance and remorse for having killed one of my fellow-men, I must shoulder the responsibility of the misery and death of a brother who has always been so nobly generous towards me and towards all his family."

Seven days after the sending of this request, which remained unanswered, Armand was very ill, but did not himself realise how near he was to death. He was asked if he would not like to see his daughter Mariette. Until then he had forbidden her to be brought to see him, refusing to appear before her in the garb of a convict.

" No," he replied, " I do not feel any worse, but would you please, this afternoon, ask my mother, when she comes to inquire after me, to bring Mariette next time—that will be on Sunday ? "

The prison director, knowing that the sick man had barely an hour to live, brought Léon to his room to say farewell, before witnesses, according to the rules.

The interview was almost silent, and the brothers exchanged long eloquent glances.

" Courage, brother," Léon said, simply.

A glass of hot wine was brought to Armand, and the dying man asked his brother to taste it first to make sure it was not too hot; then with his head leaning on Léon's

shoulder he drank the cordial, and a few minutes after, without appearing to suffer, he died.

A lamentable scene was to follow. James Peltzer, his mother and the little Mariette arrived almost immediately, and learnt that they were too late; Armand was dead.

Beside the bed, where lay her father's wasted form, looking little more than a skeleton, Mariette gave a cry of despair, and falling to her knees, shaken with sobs, she wailed:

"Oh, God, what have I done to be so unhappy? At fifteen years old I am an orphan, and my poor father is dead in this horrible house! My own poor dear father!"

A brief funeral service was read by the Protestant pastor of the prison, and the body was then taken to Verviers, where Armand was buried beside his wife.

That day Léon refused to eat anything. Later he told some friends that he had at that moment considered allowing himself to die of hunger, and only thought better of it when his lawyers advised him to wait, if only to try to clear the memory of his brother.

One of the consequences of Armand's death was that Léon could no longer receive visits from his relations more than once a quarter. Mme. Peltzer for this reason decided to leave Belgium with her grandchild Mariette, and return to Germany, her native country. Taking advantage of the last right the law allows a condemned

man, Armand had, a fortnight before his death, signed the "act of emancipation" for his daughter, which would allow her free use of the little fortune left her by her mother. This was to be her marriage portion several years later, when she wedded a young man as convinced of her father's innocence as she was herself.

Léon demanded permission to prove his brother's innocence, but his request was refused, and it was then that James took upon himself this "posthumous vindication" of his eldest brother.

If I am to be impartial I must give here a brief résumé of the memoir, a fat volume published at the end of 1885, which made a great sensation, even succeeding in shaking some people's convictions.

At the risk of prosecution for flagrant contempt of court, James accused the representatives of justice of having been prejudiced. He himself, in his efforts to clear his brother, was far from being impartial, and prejudice was perhaps understandable on his part, but it was, nevertheless, very violent and by its very excess drew attention to its injustice.

If the arguments already dealt with during the trial are excluded there remain certain arguments and facts which do indeed seem to challenge the justice of the verdict.

These are the principal points:

"The Prosecution never found the 'key' to the secret correspondence between my two brothers—they lied

in pretending the contrary, which they never proved; they simply guessed at the meaning. For example, they pretended to read in a telegram imputed to Armand: 'Look out if you go to Bremen, because C. is there' (that is, the Clazons, our brother-in-law and sister, live in that town, they might recognise you and spoil our plans). If the telegram in question had meant this, how do you explain the fact that Léon stayed for so long in Brussels, where he had every chance of meeting me, James, and our mother, and of being recognised by us before the crime was committed?[1]

"The question of the yellow trunk:

"The papers it contained, sewn up in a cloth wrapping, had been confided by Armand to my care in 1878, four years before Bernays' death (therefore there was no connection between them and that tragic event), as the sacred trust of a friend, a trust which I was to commit to the flames if the friend in question did not come to claim it three months after Armand's death. My brother took it from me on the 20th or 21st of January, 1882, so that it should not be found at a time when all his belongings were being searched, since it was a trust and had nothing to do with the Bernays affair.

"Murray? The examination discovered that a Henry Murray had stayed at Charing Cross Hotel in London, in

[1] To which might have been replied: "Camouflaged as Vaughan, he would not have been recognisable even to his mother and brother," but James would have said immediately: "It was in the same disguise that he went to Bremen."

December 1881, a few days before Léon. There had not been the slightest effort on the part of the law to find him. But the examination made a mean and underhand attempt to put me in a false position, for, on the evening before M. Otlet gave his evidence relating to David Murray, a man who said he was an English detective came to me—me—James, with the suggestion that I should provide a sensation next day in Court by producing a false Murray, whom Léon was at once to recognise as his employer!

" The letter supposed to have been sent by Léon from St. Louis on the 18th of December to his eldest brother, in order to prove an alibi, was not faked by Armand. Léon, having gone back upon his promise to break with Murray, himself wrote the letter from Paris, and gave it to Murray with instructions to post it as soon as he got back to America, so that Armand should think that he had really returned to the United States.

" The examination would not believe in the letter because there was no envelope to be found. This envelope, which Armand destroyed, was so much a reality with its American postage stamps that my mother and I both held it in our hands while he read us the contents of the letter.

" The seven revolvers found unloaded at 159 rue de la Loi had been bought by Léon as samples for a small trading venture in Africa that Murray was contemplating ; a further proof of the latter's existence.

" It is not true that Léon took care to remove all marks from the clothes he had bought in Paris. He left behind him in 159 rue de la Loi a whole selection of things bearing their Parisian labels. As to the meetings between Léon and Armand in Paris, it was my brothers themselves who informed the examining magistrate of these interviews.

" The alleged telegrams from Armand to Léon, addressed to him under the name of Wouters, were never claimed by anyone at the Hamburg poste restante. A proof that they did not come from Armand and were not intended for Léon.

" No doubt there was much that was unusual in Léon's behaviour, but then he had often given signs of mental unbalance—hence the unscrupulousness which had already brought him to bankruptcy. It explains many things, especially his mania for disguising himself and concealing his identity. He should have been submitted to a medical examination for insanity.

" The impression in the blood-stained carpet, alleged to be Armand's footprint. My brother was right in declaring that the shoes tried on him in Court did not fit. They were an old pair of my own shoes I had left one day in his house."

And James Peltzer ended, after a tirade against the injustice of justice, by producing six letters, addressed during the examination by Armand to the Public Prosecutor, insistently asking for the presence of witnesses

who would have helped to establish his innocence; these requests had not been granted.

If this tardy " posthumous vindication " raised doubts in some minds, you may imagine that it strengthened the faith of certain of the dead man's relatives, and especially of his daughter, in the innocence of Armand, of whom James said: " He died the serene death of a martyr, of a just man."

And this explains one of the elements in the second drama which, thirty years later, was to crown the first.

But before turning to this far-off epilogue, there was another incident which awoke the memory of the tragic affair shortly after Armand's death. It was the re-marriage of Mme. Bernays, the widow, to Frédéric Delvaux, a widower and father of two children. This marriage, which was dissolved only by the death of M. Delvaux, was, as it were, the public and shining manifestation of the faith of this old friend of the family in the perfect purity of Bernays' wife.

Since she became a widow for the second time, Mme. Delvaux has for many years contributed under a pseudonym to the Antwerp newspapers, where the humanitarian principles she proclaims are something akin to the idealism of Mme. Severine. She is now very old, always very courageous, and very generous, and she still devotes herself every year to the work of St. Nicholas among the poor children. As for her son Endé, he has

one of the most honourable positions at the Bar in Antwerp, where he is as much liked as he is respected.

The next part of my story may perhaps do away with any lingering doubts as to the justice of the verdict given at the Court of Assize. It is the outcome of many conversations with the ex-convict, and also of a voluminous unpublished correspondence exchanged by Léon Peltzer, from prison, with his lawyers, and after his liberation with his friends, and with myself. This correspondence covers a period of seventeen years. It ends with two last letters written in the summer of 1922 before he went voluntarily to seek death.

PART III

THE EPILOGUE

CHAPTER XXI

In all the history of prison life there is probably no parallel to the many forms of suffering endured by Léon Peltzer in his thirty years' captivity in Louvain.

To begin with his physical suffering, which, strangely enough, was due to a moral cause; it was to Léon an unbearable humiliation that he, a Peltzer, should be in a convict prison. What a blot on the fair name of his distinguished ancestors! He had shed blood purely through affection for his brother, and without the slightest personal motive for doing so, but he had shed it none the less, and the ignominious consequences of his act bitterly wounded his pride.

For thirty years Léon never once passed outside the four walls of his cell, or breathed a single gust of the pure air beyond. By the terms of the harsh and rigid prison regulations, those who wished for permission to walk in the yard had to wear the regulation prison cloak, the

symbol of ignominy, and had to mix with ruffians sentenced for the vilest crimes. His pride shrank from liberty at such a price, and he obstinately refused it. Rather than submit to such degradation, during three decades he chose to exist in the vitiated atmosphere of a room measuring a few square yards, where he could just catch a tiny glimpse of blue sky or a scrap of cloud through the dingy rain-spotted glass of the lofty skylight. When at last the day of his deliverance came, he staggered in the strong wind like a drunken man, and several times all but sprawled in the mud, a substance whose very nature and origin he had forgotten, having for almost a third of a century trod on nothing but the brick flooring of his cell.

By his refusal to wear the prison cloak and walk in the yard, he also doomed himself to an almost complete solitude, the rare visits he received becoming fewer and fewer after the departure of his mother and niece for Germany and the death of his brother James in 1907. It was like being buried alive, and more than once in the course of this asphyxiating existence Léon thought he was going mad. He followed the example of Latude, and, to relieve his feeling of utter solitude, he used to catch spiders and soliloquise to them, to keep himself from forgetting the use of speech. Only his work and the studies to which he devoted himself kept him sane and saved him from suicide.

On the death of Armand, which greatly added to his

burden of grief, he had almost made up his mind to refuse food and drink. One of the main reasons which caused him to give up the idea of seeking relief in death was the hope of a relatively imminent release. At the end of the tenth year of his confinement, M. Lejeune had become Minister of Justice. This large-hearted gentleman, one of the few visitors to Léon's cell, had gradually come to feel respect and even affection for "this victim of excessive fraternal love," and he hoped to set Bernays' murderer at liberty at the end of ten years. This was his chief reason for bringing before the House the Bill of Conditional Release, adopted in 1887, and by which he intended Léon to be the first to benefit. During a conversation with the prisoner he had said: "My door will always be open to you then, and Mme. Lejeune will be glad to receive you in our home."

Thus, in the shadows, the captive glimpsed the radiant light of day.

But this very outlook of hope was to become for Léon the source of fresh sufferings, more cruel than anything he had yet known.

First of all, the Prison Commission refused to ratify the act of clemency proposed in his favour by the Minister of Justice. Then the wheel of political fortune swept Jules Lejeune from power, and the convict saw the realisation of his only hope indefinitely deferred.

"Ah," sighed the former Minister, "why did I not take the law into my own hands, and give my commands

like a dictator, to save you from this Gehenna when I had the opportunity ? "

But together with the other lawyers for the Defence, and M. Marguery, the Town Clerk of Louvain and inspector of the prison, the Minister, though no longer in office, continued to work assiduously in the interests of his protégé, who five or six times believed he was about to return to the outside world, and as many times knew disappointment more bitter than the most disheartening certainty.

One of the " Barbarous Tales " of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, called " Torture by Hope," tells of a Spanish heretic in the Middle Ages who, the day before he is to be burned at the stake, is visited by a priest of the monastery where he is languishing in an underground dungeon.

The captive listens hopelessly to the usual exhortations to courage, but when the representative of the Inquisition leaves him, the heretic sees that, by mistake, the heavy door of his cell has been left slightly ajar ; perhaps he may yet escape. Hardly daring to breathe, his heart hammering beneath his ribs, he slips out, stealthily creeps along by the shadowy wall of the passage, withdrawing into corners when the pensive and apparently abstracted monks pass him by, almost brushing him with their long robes. After half an hour of this perilous journey he sees in the distance before him a gleam of sky, that speaks of the freedom of the open air and the

road back to life. At last he finds himself in a vast and beautiful garden, apparently deserted, and at one end there is a half-open gate. It is the door of his escape from prison and from death by fire. With a gasp of joy he darts towards it—on his shoulder he feels the weight of a heavy hand, and the voice of his recent comforter murmurs in reproachful tones: "What is this folly, my son? You would leave us now, when your deliverance by purifying flames is to be to-morrow?"

I was reminded of this ghastly tale when I re-read, in the letters Léon had sent me, the story of these thirty years, during which, time after time, he saw the door of escape opening, only to shut again. From 1890 to 1911 he ceaselessly lived through that torture which the heretic in the tale only knew for one half-hour. There is nothing that the mind of man can conceive but truth will outstrip it a thousand times!

In the year 1907, the twenty-fifth year of this dreary confinement, Léon, in the grip of an ungovernable despair, aggravated by the news of the death of his brother James, returned to the idea which had so often haunted him, of taking his own life. He had even decided upon the date of his death, when he was dissuaded by the earnest request of his lawyers, of M. Lejeune especially, and of M. Marguery, who too had come to feel something like esteem and affection for the involuntary recluse, and even went one day to lunch

with him in his cell! They appealed to Léon's generosity, and begged him not to kill himself. Such a tragic end would break his mother's heart. It would recall the memory of his sensational crime, and thus would bring suffering on his whole family, and especially on Armand's daughter, now in her turn a mother, and whose eldest daughter, recently betrothed, would see her future shadowed by the memory of the now forgotten past.

He knew that the majority of the members of the Prison Commission were firmly opposed to his liberation, as well as the members and old friends of the victim's family, who thought—it was only human—that such a crime could never be sufficiently expiated.

But there was a terrible fact—very human too, alas!—of which he was not aware. That the most determined and active of those who opposed his liberation were *his own niece and her husband!* For Mariette (you must understand this, for to understand all is to forgive all) her father had never been guilty except of seeking to shelter Léon from the consequences of his crime. She believed her father to be an innocent martyr, a victim, as much as Bernays himself, of his younger brother, who time and again had brought him to ruin. Even had she been able to bring herself to forgive her uncle, the idea of his reappearance in society, and of all the sordid memories it would revive, filled her with fear like the thought of a ghost coming back from the grave.

It was the thought of his niece that made Léon decide to " renew the lease of his hell upon earth," as he said. You can imagine what it would have meant to him then had he learnt of her efforts to perpetuate his captivity. He was to hear of it later, but at a time when it was infinitely more bearable.

CHAPTER XXII

Since the fifth or sixth year of his life in prison he had been helped to bear his intolerable isolation by an interesting and instructive occupation that he owed to his exceptional gifts as a linguist. Already master of four languages, French, German, English and Flemish, he had while in prison taught himself Spanish and Italian also. He soon became a sort of anonymous and invisible translator for the Ministry of Justice and even for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, it was then customary for the prison director to allow the most educated of the convicts to copy for students the notes of lectures at the University of Louvain, who thus benefited by the absurdly low charges made by the prisoners. To Léon fell the monopoly of these tasks, and he found in them an education of a high standard such as he himself had never received. M. Picard once or twice surreptitiously handed over to him work, no less intellectual; amongst other things he commissioned him to put in order the rough draft of one of Cladel's novels. And then, the eight-hours day not having been instituted at that time (even in prisons), when his obligatory work was over, he was allowed to quench his thirst for learning in

study. The generosity of his mother enabled him to do this, and still more the kindness of his sister, Mme. Alice Bocking, who lived in Sarrebruck, and whose compassion had never deserted him. Unknown to the authorities, the latest scientific and literary publications and the best illustrated papers were smuggled into his cell. These gave him the illusion that he was not entirely cut off from the world, which was constantly passing before his eyes in a procession of pictures and photographs. He found here relief from his misery, and in addition he was forging for himself an exceptional intellectual armour.

These translations and copies of lectures brought to the convict something that a free man could never have gained, distracted by other duties, preoccupations and pleasures of every kind. His concentration of mind in an isolation and silence almost unbroken gave his traffic with books and the play of his reflections an extraordinary value. And there followed, little by little, a mental and even a moral evolution which was partly due also to his rare but instructive conversations with such men as Jules Lejeune, M. Marguery, and Constantin Meunier,[1] whose inspiring advice was repaid by

[1] The great sculptor, who still lived in Louvain, and who had known Armand and Léon Peltzer through his wife, who had taught them the piano, when the regulations allowed, used to visit the murderer. The lofty idealism of the great artist did much to influence the moral growth of the condemned man.

the interest, not to say the charm of the conversation of this "involuntary hermit." For he could talk with knowledge on all subjects, not excluding recent developments in every branch of science, and he had had unparalleled opportunity and leisure to reflect.

M. Lejeune had given him a portrait of himself, which "lights up my cell," said the recluse. In truth, as he realised himself, the murderer of Bernays had become a new man. His long meditations in the past had revealed to him its secret. By submitting them to analysis he discovered the causes of the grave mistakes of his youth, and of his final crime, accomplished almost automatically by an "undeveloped" man, whose will had not been directed by a clear-sighted conscience. Now he knew; he was "in full possession of the meaning and explanations of his own actions." "It seems to me," he wrote from prison, "that I have emerged from a long sleep, during which I have left behind the child I used to be, and have become a man." If he now regretted having killed a fellow-man, he became proud of the instinct of fraternal devotion that had led him to it, he gloried in the noble motive of an unpardonable deed. His one desire was to regain his liberty, to be able to undo the past by the methodical application of his passion for unselfishness, and for devotion to others.

In this reformed "gallows bird" there was something of the sublime. Before the members of the Prison Com-

mission, who came to interview him from time to time, he obstinately maintained the attitude which justified in their eyes the indefinite duration of his punishment. He continued to protest with all his strength against the justice of the sentence passed on Armand. He still persisted in taking all the blame upon himself, as he had done during the trial, and obstinately declared that his brother had never for a moment been party to the murder.

"Then," they answered him with harsh and inflexible logic, "you have not repented, and do not deserve pardon—confess the truth and you are free!"

"I cannot confess that which is not true," he replied, unshaken.

Whatever my readers may think, I ask them to pause for a moment and consider this problem:

Léon perhaps spoke the truth, and his brother had neither planned nor carried out the crime; but this brother had been dead a long time; did it show unexpected heroism on the part of the "gallows bird" in condemning himself to the horrors of an endless imprisonment rather than tarnish the memory of the innocent dead?

Or, Léon lied, unhesitatingly, with the fidelity of a dog, to acquit the memory of a brother whose guilt was far greater than his own, to whiten the sepulchre, though it meant perpetuating his own martyrdom. Is "sub-

lime " too big a word to use for the majesty of such an obstinate lie ?

Those who still doubt—and there may be some—that this second supposition is the true one, will find their doubts vanish before the end of my story.

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CHAPTER XXIII

He had been immured for twenty-three years when M. Adolphe Prins, the well-known writer on economic law, was nominated General Inspector of Prisons, and went to pay a visit to the murderer with a view to considering the possibility of his eventual liberation. Léon knew that the previous *Avocat-Général*, M. Van Schoor, one of the most formidable opponents of such an act of clemency, had held this stern conviction (this "heresy," Léon called it): "The commutation of the death penalty to life imprisonment does away with the right of eventual pardon," and M. Adolphe Prins was said to have adopted this merciless doctrine. Léon questioned him about it, and this is more or less the dialogue that took place.

M. Prins: "I consider that, necessarily, there can be no release for those who have been condemned to death."

Léon: "That is true, M. l'Inspecteur. It is right that men who have killed for greed of gain should not be restored to life in society. They would remain a social danger."

M. Prins: "But surely that was the very motive of your crime."

Léon (dumbfounded): "What did you say, M. l'Inspecteur? What could I gain from the murder?"

M. Prins (surprised in turn): "Come, come! What of the life insurance policy that M. Bernays had taken out, and which you and your brother hoped to share?"

Léon: "But, M. l'Inspecteur, who told you this abominable lie? Armand and I never even knew that the insurance existed. Besides, M. Bernays had made it payable only to his son, and in any case . . ."

M. Prins: "Excuse me, M. Peltzer. I am in a hurry."

Léon: "But still, M. l'Inspecteur, do not leave me under the shadow of such a stunning accusation!"

M. Prins: "I have an engagement, I tell you, but I will come back again and we can discuss the matter another time."

And the great man, who had spoken in all good faith, left the prisoner a prey to a new torture, beneath the lash of a new suspicion.

I have before me a letter of more than two hundred lines, in small close handwriting, that the prisoner wrote next day, New Year's Eve, 1906, to M. Picard, begging him and the other lawyers who had defended the case to take this matter up.

Not content with having inflicted on him so many years of intolerable punishment, they had suddenly sprung upon him a new accusation, alleged a new motive for his murder—in his eyes, the basest motive imaginable.

The Prosecution had rejected the absurd story of the insurance policy as worthless. The insurance company had been forced to take back their ridiculous demand that the two accused should refund the 100,000 francs handed over to Endé. The authorities had not paid the slightest attention to this extravagant tale; the indictment and the evidence had assigned to Léon no other motive than gratitude to his brother, and to Armand no other motive than passion for a woman. In this very prison of Louvain, M. Willemaers had twice said to Léon: "No, I acknowledge it, there was no money in your crime." And now, almost a quarter of a century after, this odious insult was flung in his face—he had killed for gold! He felt it more deeply than anything he had yet suffered, besides which, it was but another pretext to keep him entombed till death should free him.

Carefully he went over the events: before the tragedy, M. Edouard Pecher, Mme. Bernays' father, whose business had not been doing well, had had to suspend the annuity he had formerly given his daughter. Bernays, anxious for the future of his son, had then taken out in his favour this insurance policy of 100,000 francs, the principal of which his widow could not touch, though, until the majority of Endé, she would have the use of the interest, representing an income of 3,000 francs. It was in the hope of gaining a part of this miserable sum that Armand and he, who could not possibly have claimed it in any case, had plotted murder! Moreover, like

everyone else, they had been absolutely ignorant of the very existence of Bernays' provision for his son, for the secret had been so well guarded that his wife herself only discovered it when she was searching through her husband's desk after his disappearance.

" It is absolutely ridiculous ! " exclaimed M. Lejeune, when Léon told him of the conversation with M. Prins.

M. Prins had been taken in by the statements of M. X., one of the members of the Prison Commission who opposed most strongly Léon's liberation. After M. Lejeune had informed him of the truth, he generously admitted his error. Meanwhile, and this throws a vivid light on the curious psychology of the murderer, no accusation had so grieved and depressed him as this insult, which stained his brother's memory and reduced his own guilt to the level of sordid greed: " You killed for money ! "

In another letter I have from him, this revolt against the suspicion of such a motive was expressed in violent terms at the time of the trial of a modern Brinvilliers. She had just been condemned for having poisoned, one by one in her house, five or six of her nearest relations so as to get possession of their money, which she had contrived should be left to her. " What a monster of a woman ! " exclaimed Léon, " and they would put us on the same plane with her, my poor brother and I ! "

Bitterly he felt the truth of the words: " There are degrees in crime as well as in virtue."

A student of the penal code, he had found in it another source of profound discontent. He wrote a brochure, arguing his case with extraordinary clarity, and dedicated it to M. Van Viervloet, one of those most inflexibly opposed to his liberation. Amongst others, he produced this almost irrefutable argument:

"A man who has committed a crime for money, and who cannot be found, and remains unpunished at the end of twenty years, is then at liberty to come back openly to enjoy the fruits of his evil-doing, and perhaps to commit once more the crime that has served him so well. Yet, after nearly thirty years of expiation, liberty is refused to one who has committed a crime through affection for his brother, when the motive can never again arise, and who therefore becomes innocuous. It is a scandalous contradiction, a legal iniquity which ought to be stopped in the interests of the public, so that at least the penalty of the criminal who has paid the price shall not exceed by a single day that of the defaulter whom time has made immune."

To these causes of indignation and despair was added in the beginning of 1911 the death of the venerable M. Lejeune, who had been for thirty years the friend and guardian angel of the convict. The news was broken to him by a long and pathetic letter from the son of his benefactor, whom his father had charged to look after Léon in his stead. The idea of suicide would no doubt have stalked once more in the prison of Louvain, had not

M. Henry Carton de Wiart succeeded to the office of Minister of Justice, and thus given the prisoner once more cause for hope.

M. Carton de Wiart, a former assistant and partner of M. Lejeune, regarded that great and good man with something like adoration. He knew that the dearest dream of the former Minister had been to give Léon his freedom, and the realisation of that wish seemed to him the most worthy homage he could pay to his revered memory. But he realised from the first the terrible barriers of hostility he would have to beat down before he could achieve his object, and in a visit to Léon he gave him to understand that he must not count on what might once again lead only to the pain of disappointment.

M. Marguery, in spite of a painful illness, continued to fight for the freedom of Bernays' murderer, and urged the lawyers who were interested in the case, especially M. Schoenfeld, to unite with him in his efforts. He enrolled me too among the workers in the cause which meant so much to him.

He soon enlisted my sympathy by telling me much of the prisoner's sad story. I was ready to defend him publicly with my pen, but M. Schoenfeld, and Léon himself, who had been informed of my good intentions, begged me to refrain for the present, as all pressure from outside at that time was liable to hinder rather than to help the cautious and still secret movements of the Minister M. Carton de Wiart. It was of the greatest

importance not to warn the "die-hards," who were determined that Léon should remain "a convict until the day of his death."

This was during the months of March and April 1911. Towards the end of summer, M. Marguery, in a further interview which I had with him in the country at Tertelt, asked me, rather than resort to the Press campaign I had contemplated, to exercise any personal influence I might have with the Minister of Justice, whom I had the honour of knowing as a "brother in literature." Once the conditional pardon had been irrevocably promised, I was to publish one or two articles to prepare public opinion and disarm in advance any dangerous opposition that might ensue. I followed this programme step by step. As her contribution, Mme. Bocking, the faithful sister of the convict, wrote to the Minister of Justice an appealing letter, thanking him for the magnanimous action he was about to perform, and incidentally protesting against the wicked pressure brought to bear by her niece and Armand's son-in-law against the liberation of her brother, for whom she expressed an undying affection because of "the kindness and gentleness of his disposition." To destroy a possible objection, she promised that she would provide for the material needs of her brother until his last days.

And on the 29th of September, 1911, M. Marguery informed me that the Prison Commission, approached by M. Carton de Wiart, had at last given their sanction,

by a majority of five votes to four. An equal vote (four against four), which would again have given a negative result, had only been avoided by the heroism of M. Marguery himself, who, to give his vote in favour of his protégé, had been brought from his bed of suffering to the meeting of the Commission held in the prison itself.

Léon entered the prison cell at the age of thirty-five and came out at sixty-five. He was as yet unaware of the conditions of his release, and, in accordance with the instructions sent in a sealed envelope to the Director of the prison, was not to learn them until the very moment when his name was scratched from the prison roll.

It was at close of day on the 11th of October, 1911, that the prisoner heard the words he had waited for during so many long years: "Léon Peltzer, you are free."

In his joy he heard but vaguely the conditions of his return to the world of the living. He must depart immediately for the German frontier, where his sister Mme. Bocking and his old mother were waiting to welcome him for the last time; then he must set sail for some foreign country, where, under a borrowed name, he must spend the rest of his existence, never disclosing or publishing anything that might awake the hushed echoes of his sinister past.

CHAPTER XXIV

It was some weeks before Léon realised the full significance of his new situation.

His first action was to disobey the instructions, for a reason greatly to his credit. At the risk of being once more arrested and sent back to his cell for "breaking his ban," Léon, on leaving his mother and sister on the frontier of Germany, did not embark for England, his final destination. He took the train to Paris so as to fulfil, whatever the cost, what he considered to be a sacred duty, to express to me personally his gratitude for my part—which indeed I thought very slight—in bringing about his freedom.

One morning I was told that someone had come to see me, who refused to give his name as he wanted to give me a surprise. In a few moments I found myself in the presence of a tall old man. The bones stood out sharply on his lean face, half his teeth were missing, and he was almost completely bald. He was, however, well dressed, and gazed at me with a sad and mild expression. He bent towards me and whispered in my ear:

"Léon!"

I could hardly repress a start. The ex-convict had all the appearance of an aristocratic old gentleman. And suddenly

I remembered the trial, and the loud guffaws that had burst out every time that Armand had said: "No, I did not say, or do, this or that—the Peltzers are gentlemen."

Although I had played but a small part in obtaining his release, the ex-prisoner thanked me profusely, and in tones that covered me with confusion.

I asked him about his first sensations on being liberated, and he told me of his astonishment at the sight of the mud on the roads of Louvain which he had encountered outside the prison on his way to the station. Even to-day his legs, idle for so long, trembled as he walked along the Paris boulevards and he found himself obliged constantly to sink down on to a bench.

After thirty years of silence and solitude, the noise and concentrated movement of Paris bewildered although it did not astonish him. He knew through his reading all about the prodigious growth of social activity, and, during a short walk in the neighbourhood of my hotel, he pointed out to me with a precision I could never hope to emulate the make and horse-power of each car that sped past us. He spoke also of the political situation with an amazing comprehensiveness and a singular boldness of outlook.

I discreetly inquired as to his resources. The meagre product of his thirty years' work as a convict amounted to no more than a few hundred francs, but the inexhaustible generosity of his sister was to relieve him of all material anxiety. Besides this, he would endeavour to lighten the burden on Mme. Bocking's purse by obtaining

employment in England. He had chosen England as his land of exile, although Mme. Bocking would have received him in her house in Germany, for he feared to cast the fated shadow of his past over the sister who had been so good to him.

Strange as it may seem, although I have always been an ardent student of psychology, I abstained, as from an unpardonable cruelty, from putting to the murderer a single question on the subject of the drama in which he had played one of the chief parts. The psychologist, the journalist, the writer smothered their curiosity beneath an innate sense of sympathy and reserve. I stood as a man before a fellow-man mortally hurt, whose recent wounds were still too new for me to touch with probing fingers.

It was Léon himself who, during our second conversation, took occasion to allude to the past. He told me that, on the night of the 4th of March, 1882, when, to the great alarm of Armand, he returned to Brussels, it was with the definite intention of giving himself up.

Appearances were beginning to look black against his brother, and he had hoped by confessing his guilt to save him. It was Armand who had persuaded him to disappear again, saying: "It is too late to save me, I have already compromised myself; they will only think we have plotted the murder between us. You can serve me best by remaining hidden." (He did not then know of Dr. Lavisé's determination to denounce him.)

All the time Léon seemed to be trying indirectly to convince me of the innocence of his brother, and I did not attempt to contradict him.

He took a childish pleasure in giving me a proof of the mighty effort he had made to hide his despair when he was arrested at Cologne. He drew from his pocket a cigarette holder, whose amber mouthpiece bore the print of the deep incision of two teeth.

"To hide my agitation," he said, "I bit this holder with all my strength, and the hard substance of the amber bears this permanent trace of my emotion and my assumed indifference."

When he left me he begged me to be good enough to write to him in London, although apologising for trespassing upon my scanty leisure. More than food and drink, the knowledge that those who had had compassion on him in prison had not forgotten him would help him in his efforts to adapt himself to his new life and to become a useful member of society.

As his new name he chose "Albert Preitelle"—an anagram of the original name of his family—"Pelletier." For in old times his family had been French, but as they were Protestants, they had been forced to emigrate after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes to Germany, where by translation the name had become Peltzer.[1] But a century and a half later, when many of the Peltzers left

[1] "Pelletier" is the French for "furrier," while "Peltzer" is the German equivalent.

Germany and went to live in Belgium, they had had time to become completely Germanised. In Léon, born as you know in Verviers, this influence manifested itself in his turn of phrase, in his weighty sentences, and in the small writing which had all the angularity of Gothic characters.

My sympathy went out to the murderer when he took leave of me, and, keeping my word, I replied without delay to the first letter he wrote me from London.

Our correspondence was not long in revealing to me the new tragedy—the private silent tragedy—that came to this " ghost " from the world of the living dead.

In the boarding-house where " Albert Preitelle " had installed himself, the emptiness of his existence had quickly become intolerable to him. He realised the impossibility of getting employment at his age without references and with his former life behind a curtain he was forbidden to draw. This pariah existence must linger on indefinitely. If he had even been able to kill time by studying in the British Museum library, that temple of Science and Literature . . . but for that it was necessary to obtain the recommendation and guarantee of some Englishman, and who would recommend him—an outcast, an exile of whom nothing was known ?

I hastened to write to an old and influential friend of mine, William Heinemann, the publisher. Naturally I did not reveal to him the identity of my protégé, but I

begged him to furnish M. Albert Preitelle with the introduction he desired. He at once did so, and the ex-convict became an assiduous visitor to the library of the British Museum.

But then another cancer came to gnaw at his heart.

The graciousness of his manner, and the interest of his conversation, drew to him the sympathy of the more intelligent among the residents in the London boarding-house—a sympathy he would have shunned. He wrote to me: "I feel that I am all the time cheating and deceiving those who have given their sympathy to me under the name of Albert Preitelle, knowing nothing of all that has gone before. For, did they know who I am, these people who seek my company would inevitably recoil in horror. Here I am then, condemned to a perpetual lie, to a masquerade in which I must for ever forget myself and my identity, and play the part of a venerable gentleman whose life has been of blameless integrity."

Perhaps you smile, and question the sincerity of such scruples. What next! you say. The "gaol-bird," this ex-Henry Vaughan, for whom the habit of false names has become second nature, could not bring himself to disguise his identity once more! But do not forget that thirty years had made Léon a different being, infinitely unlike his former self. Moreover, in the past his disguises had only been temporary expedients, with a definite end in view; but now, until his death he must always be some-

body else, and suffer continually through his inability frankly and loyally to show his true face, to tear off the mask that was stifling him.

He actually came to regret his horrible cell in Louvain. There at least there had been no need for him to deceive strangers about his past. There he had never had to pretend. He was well known as the authentic Léon Peltzer, who had murdered through affection for his brother, infinitely superior to his fellow-prisoners, and constantly occupied in work of public utility, translating and copying. Down there he had been able to carry his head high, as a criminal who had expiated, paid his debt and repented. Now he was compelled to deceive everyone, and he felt that the lies he was obliged to tell fenced him around with imprisoning barriers stronger than the walls of his cell.

But his inaction galled him for another reason. Once more a witness of the bustle of life in a big city, where everyone is occupied with his own or his neighbour's business, he had to stand with his arms folded, unable to join in the work that was going on around him, like a Lazarus raised from the tomb, but doomed to sit for evermore upon the stone and gaze in forced inertia at the rest of mankind, living, moving and working round about him.

"All the world's a stage," says Hamlet; "men have their exits and their entrances." Léon Peltzer had played his part, but he had not been permitted to dis-

appear behind the curtain. He remained and continued to watch the performance of countless actors, like a corpse that does not lose its consciousness and yet counts in the world only as a lifeless thing. A little more and he would have gone back to gaol, begging as a last favour to be taken in and never more released.

I did my best to comfort him. I recalled the words spoken to me once by the great and witty actress, Réjane: "Once dead, how I should like to be able to come back to earth once in a hundred years, even were it only for a few days, to see from century to century the progress of the human comedy." I repeated her words to "Albert Preitelle," and reminded him of the wish of the author of "Mme. Sans-Gêne": "Just as actors who have retired from the stage are given a permanent pass to the theatre to watch the acting of their successors, I could wish that the dead were allowed an 'honorary existence,' and were admitted to the spectacle of the lives of others. Thus would they be doubly happy, for they would continue to enjoy the mighty pageant of life without knowing any of its burdens, its weariness and care. Circumstances have granted to 'Albert Preitelle' this extraordinary privilege. Why do you shun this draught that tasted sweet to the lips of a philosopher?"

He was neither convinced nor comforted.

"You cannot conceive," he answered, "the devouring and humiliating suffering of seeing and hearing from the depths of your grave all living around you. I am not an

actor who has retired, my face is still painted, my whole being is a travesty; the conditions of my release force me to play an unworthy rôle, when I still feel myself, alas! capable of striding once more on to the stage to play a new part, a part that might compensate for the sad rôle I filled before; and my hands and feet are bound—for ever!"

In the end, obsessed by this unforeseen torment, he changed his residence, and went to live in a boarding-house in Brighton, that famous health resort where old gentlemen and invalids come to claim from the invigorating seaside a few more years of comparative happiness. There Léon's forced inactivity did not suffer by contrast with the turmoil of the city, and his presence excited less disturbing curiosity than in London, where the idler feels himself an intruder, worthy only of contempt. For some months he was much the better for this change, for his craving for helping others found an unexpected outlet. This "gentle old man" had met in his Brighton boarding-house two humble spinsters, who wrote articles which they endeavoured to publish, both to satisfy their pride as authors and to supplement their scanty income. They could never find a publisher in London except in those small magazines which paid exclusively in the coin of "fame"—and what fame! "Perhaps," Albert Preitelle wrote to me, "their writing might find a lucrative sale in Belgium or France, if you would be good enough to give it a start." He translated the works

of his protégés into French, asking no remuneration, the pleasure of such a task constituting more than enough reward. How could I fail to second this touching generosity on the part of an old convict for two poor women? The specimens of their prose, translated by him, appeared to be pretty enough, but not sufficiently original to attract the papers and magazines to which I submitted them, and they were always politely declined. Nevertheless, for a time this effort, and his hope of helping his friends, brought back the ebbing courage of the exile. Their failure, of which he well understood the reasons, flung him into an abyss of sadness and weariness. He wrote to M. Carton de Wiart, telling him of his tragic situation, but the Minister could in no way alter the formal conditions of his pardon.

CHAPTER XXV

Then Providence intervened on behalf of the ex-convict, in the guise of a rich philanthropist of Brussels, Mme. B., and her two sons, one of whom owned a large tea and rubber plantation in the delightful island of Ceylon. M. Marguery, a dear friend of this generous family, had interested them in Léon Peltzer and his fate. Mme. B. was only too glad to be able to assist him in any way she could, but it was necessary to proceed with caution, to avoid injuring the susceptibilities of the ex-convict, whose pride rebelled against assistance from anyone except his sister.

Informed of the distress of mind of the outcast, M. B., junior, at his mother's suggestion, went to pay him a visit in Brighton. His brother in Ceylon, it appeared, urgently needed a secretary, a man whom he could trust, and of mature judgment. Léon seemed eminently qualified for the situation, and his health would benefit from the most wonderful climate in the world. Is there not an old legend that tells how Ceylon was once the Garden of Eden? After some hesitation, on account of the distance from his old mother and sister, "Albert Preitelle" accepted the offer with gratitude; but when

M. B. said to him: " My brother will settle with you the amount of your salary when you get out there," he almost refused to go. To live under the roof of M. B., in the midst of a numerous family, to know the joys of home life, would reward ten times over any services that he could render, and he would be mortally offended if money ever entered into the question. The allowance his sister gave him would be enough and more than enough.

Only on condition that all idea of salary was given up did he decide to sail for India in July 1912. Knowing that I was on holiday at Ostend, for I still kept up a constant correspondence with him, Léon again broke his ban to come and say good-bye to me. His eyes shone with enthusiasm at the thought of becoming once more of use in the world.

During the long journey this ex-convict, nearly sixty-seven years old, took his first lessons in typewriting, so as to be fully qualified for his future situation as secretary. Though his old fingers had lost their suppleness, he disciplined them during the journey till they achieved mastery of the keyboard; they moved slowly indeed, but with perfect accuracy.

He was to pass two or three years of blissful tranquillity in his Asiatic surroundings. As M. B. knew all about him he had no need to make a secret of his past. Except for his " patron," the family and the numerous Cingalese servants, he saw little of society; the distance between

the plantations in Ceylon being very great, and visits, consequently, very rare. In any case, when visitors came, the fact that he was secretary to M. B. invested the old man with an unquestionable integrity, so that he never had to utter a lie in answer to any indiscreet questions. Everyone, moreover, seemed to take an immediate liking to Léon for his old-fashioned courtesy of manner and the varied wealth of his learning. The only difference that sometimes arose between him and M. B. was due to Léon's excessive generosity. He hopelessly spoiled the children, who soon came to call him "Pa-Papa," spending on sweets and picture books for them the best part of his slender annuity.

It is necessary out there to treat the coloured servants with a certain amount of severity, as they simply despise white men who are unduly indulgent towards them. One of the most effective methods of discipline is a fine, inflicted for serious offences. "Albert Preitelle" could not bear the idea of this punishment. No sooner had one of the black delinquents paid his fine than he would take him aside, and from his own purse make up the amount. The native would laugh in his sleeve, and repeat the offence at the first opportunity, well knowing that the old "Pa-Papa" would save him from the consequences. When M. B. at length discovered this habit of Léon's, he was naturally displeased, and reproached his secretary for his dangerous largesse; but Léon remained incorrigible. Do you remember Jean Valjean,

in " Les Misérables," and his prodigal generosity after he became M. Madeleine ?

In the island of Ceylon the ex-convict lived sheltered from the overwhelming horrors of the Great War, though he suffered when he thought of the uncertain fate of his old mother and his sister, who were still in Germany, and of the unspeakable wrongs inflicted on the country of his adoption. Difficulty of communication very often robbed him of the allowance from his sister, and therefore of the means of giving pleasure to others, which had become a dear habit with him. The thirty years of seclusion, taking their toll of health and strength, had left their trace. He began to show symptoms of albuminuria and his health was further weakened by phlebitis.

After the war, and the conclusion of the Armistice, M. B. proposed that Léon should look after the house while he himself returned to Belgium to visit his family and reorganise certain matters which had become confused during the long and frightful years of war. Léon Peltzer refused. He would have liked to have taken over the supervision of the plantations during the absence of his employer, and thus, in spite of his physical disabilities, double his services to his benefactor, and satisfy at once his pride and his passion for sacrifice. M. B. was forced to decline this offer. His guest's excessive gentleness in dealing with the blacks would simply have led to their getting out of hand. *The ex-murderer was infinitely too humane.*

CHAPTER XXVI

Léon then asked and obtained permission to return to Europe with M. B., who succeeded in getting a false passport for him, made out in the name of "Albert Preitelle." When they landed at Marseilles at the end of July 1919, seven years after Léon's departure for the East, the two travellers were met by M. B. junior. Léon, at the end of his resources, borrowed from him 500 francs (which M. B. tried in vain to make him accept as a gift) to enable him to travel to Sarrebruck in Germany to meet his sister. In spite of the difficulties of travel at that time, even for those who had the most regular passports, nothing could deter him from carrying out the perilous journey. He succeeded, but when he left Sarrebruck again for Belgium, he seemed to have aged by many years. For the worst news had met him in Germany. He had found his sister on the brink of ruin, and unable even to receive him in her house, which was occupied by French officers as a result of the Treaty of Versailles giving the French the occupation of the Sarre. From the last of her savings and with the utmost difficulty, Mme. Bocking had scraped together sufficient to enable her brother to repay his debt to M. B. She could do

nothing more for him, and Léon when he returned to Brussels was a soul in torment more than ever before.

How was he going to live? He who would accept nothing from strangers! He might have gone back to Ceylon, but there arose a new and insurmountable difficulty. Passports were only being issued after a thorough investigation of the facts stated. How could an ex-convict who had broken his ban, and was liable to arrest the moment he was recognised, hope to obtain one? His protectors addressed themselves confidentially to M. C. de Wiart, who declared that he could do nothing, since he was no longer Minister, and was both annoyed and irritated at Peltzer's failure to keep the terms of his release.

After many fruitless discussions the case was submitted to M. Jasper, then Minister for Foreign Affairs. A former student of M. Lejeune's, and aware of his master's kindly feeling towards the murderer of Bernays, M. Jasper did his best. He even got as far as signing the necessary papers for Léon's return to India when a new complication arose. M. B., who had returned alone to Ceylon, was suddenly obliged by bereavement to come back to Europe. He offered Léon a situation with another planter, but the old man's pride revolted at some of the conditions of employment, and in addition his failing health left him ill equipped to face so long a voyage. On the other hand, though he was charmed by the kindness of his host, he felt that he could not much

longer accept the hospitality he was enjoying in M. B.'s beautiful Brussels home. A prolonged stay was, moreover, impossible from the point of view of safety, for it could only end in awakening the curiosity of the servants, who would inevitably try to find the key to the mystery of this aged guest, and might perhaps discover it. For there was in the house an old valet named G . . . who had vivid recollections of the Peltzer Case. In his youth he had not missed a single one of the sittings of the Court, and had joined with those who cried " To the scaffold ! " behind the prison van bearing the two accused.

Until now this servant had had no suspicion of the respectable, gentle and kindly old man whom he served daily, and who rewarded him for his services with large and frequent gratuities. But he used often to relate to his fellow servants in the house, the details of the drama of the rue de la Loi, and the slightest indiscretion might reveal to him the true identity of " Albert Preitelle," to whom an impenetrable incognito was of such importance. Although he was destitute, it was therefore absolutely necessary for the outcast to find elsewhere shelter and the means of livelihood which he refused to accept from M. B. Once again his past dragged him down like a mill-stone round his neck.

As a solution to the problem, the B. family found him employment in a business house in Brussels, where his

salary would ensure his independence, subject to strict economy. But his passion for giving remained, and one day, after dining with M. B., he managed to slip fifty francs into the hand of G . . . who had served him at table.

He kept his position for nearly two and a half years, with intervals of enforced idleness spent in the hospital of St. Elisabeth. But at last he felt that the money paid for services which his age and shattered health prevented him from fulfilling as he would have liked was nothing more than charity in disguise. The ruin of Mme. Bocking, his sister, had been completed by the devastating fall of the mark, and after he had left his employment he found himself definitely without means of subsistence.

He made up his mind, once and for all, to die. M. B., whom he informed of his intention, strove in vain to dissuade him. He offered gladly to provide for his last days in some comfortable retreat in Brussels, or in a plantation in Ceylon, where, freed from exacting labour, he would have nothing to do but let himself live. Léon's pride rebelled. He would never consent to become a burden to a stranger, however kind and generous he might be. To all objections he made his final reply in two letters which I have here before me, probably the last he wrote (dated the 30th of May and the 2nd of June, 1921), in which he discussed his project of suicide

with as little apparent emotion as if it had simply been a matter of changing his residence. "I shall approach death very tranquilly," he wrote, "with the feeling of thus ending, normally, a life which has reached its term, since it has become absolutely useless."

Since he had ceased all work and decided to make an end, his physical health had slightly improved. He declared that he did not consider this a reason for prolonging an existence henceforth devoid of all purpose.

Triumphantly he produced a letter from his sister, in whose judgment and affection he had unlimited confidence. She had gone into her position with her lawyer. From the remaining shreds of her fortune she had no longer enough to supply even the modest requirements of her dear Léon, and even her death would be of no value to her brother, for she would have so little to leave him that the enormous death duties now in force would absorb all the legacy and more. In these circumstances she sanctioned Léon's resolution, and in the same spirit of invincible pride. Since she herself could do no more for him, he was right not to hesitate between the choice of a few more years of parasitic existence and death. In her eyes death was the only honourable solution—Stoicism as in the old days!

Léon had revealed everything to M. B.—even the method of suicide (by drowning) he had chosen; every-

thing except the time and place of its execution, and no man living could stop him.

He had, for several weeks back, been planning the smallest details of his exit from life. Here again he showed himself a true German to the end, son of a race of men who never improvise, who never attempt anything on impulse, who map out their plans with meticulous care, and seek beforehand to bind the hands of Destiny so that she can outwit them with nothing but the "unforeseen." The "unforeseen" which had destroyed the seeming certainty of success in the crime of the rue de la Loi was not to rise up this time between Léon and his desire.

On the 2nd of July, 1922, in a small hotel near the Gare du Nord in Brussels, he had a conversation with the former Protestant chaplain of his prison in Louvain, and in saying farewell he gave him the remainder of his slender savings to distribute in alms. He kept only what was necessary for his last journey. As he had done once before, he removed all labels and marks from his clothes, and destroyed everything that might furnish a clue to his identity, so that no trace, legally recognisable as such, should betray his incognito if his body should be found.

He took the train for Ostend, where he stayed for twenty-four hours. Then going further out in the direction of Western Flanders, he stopped at a point where

rescue would be impossible . . . and tranquilly, without a glance behind him, Léon Peltzer plunged and sank, fully dressed, into the hungry sea.

The waves kept his body, tossed it on their crests for two whole days, and then carried it to the shore, quite near Clemskerke, at the boundary between Coq-sur-Mer and Vlisseghem, where the sea-currents bring the suicides of Ostend.

CHAPTER XXVII

THEN there occurred a grim coincidence, perhaps the most incredible incident in all this incredible story; a coincidence unsuspected by those who witnessed it, and which seemed to me at first utterly impossible had it not been for the explanation which guaranteed its truth.

On the 5th of July, 1922, when the corpse was carried from the seashore to the mortuary at Clemskerke for the legal declaration and the coffining, it had for a shroud the carpet on which Léon Peltzer had spilt the blood of Bernays on the 7th January, 1882, at 159 rue de la Loi, Brussels.

The reader may well refuse to believe such an improbable story. By what sorcery, divine or diabolic, could this piece of stuff, a kind of mute witness of the crime, have survived through forty years, travel from Brussels to the coast of France, and there wait at the exact place where it would serve as a winding-sheet to the murderer?

Here is the exact history of the grisly relic as it passed from hand to hand, unconsciously on its way, stage by stage, to its awful destination.

After the trial in 1882, M. Guyau, the dealer who had partially furnished the house at 159 rue de la Loi for Henry Vaughan, took possession of the furniture again, including the blood-stained carpet. Later he gave this

" historic " carpet to Mme. Grimard, mother of Georges Grimard, the distinguished sheriff of Brussels who had died a few months before. She lived at that time in an unfurnished flat in the rue de Berlaimont. A few years later, Mme. Grimard left the flat, and M. Alfred Castaigne, the well-known publisher, transferred his business there. He arranged for the Peltzer-Bernays carpet to be left on the floor. Shortly after this, he sent it to Coq-sur-Mer, to be installed in a house which he owned on that part of the coast. Finally, the carpet became so dilapidated that M. Castaigne gave it away to one of his farmers, who lived between Coq and Clemskerke, and so it came to be employed by its new owner and his son the carrier, Vander Stichelen, as a covering or awning for his carts in bad weather. By the workings of what is usually called " chance," when the corpse of Léon Peltzer was found on the shore at Clemskerke, it was this farmer that the police requisitioned to assist them in taking it away. As the body, still dripping with water, had to be wrapped in something, Vander Stichelen ran up with the covering of his cart, the carpet from the rue de la Loi.

Such are the stages, so simple and yet so extraordinary, through which the most important piece of circumstantial evidence had passed to appear in the funeral procession of the drowned man on a deserted part of the seashore. The story was told me as an absolute fact by my friend M. Alfred Castaigne himself.

Surely such a story must send a shudder, not only through the naïvely superstitious, but through thinkers, philosophers and moralists, who seek to explain the mysterious influences that govern human lives.

That the carpet bearing its guilty stain, after so many vicissitudes and so many years, should come at last to cover the murderer himself, is surely a symbol of crime, pursuing the criminal across time and across space, and finding him even in death. Léon Peltzer desired to make his end in secret, in the depths of the sea. He did everything to hide his identity in impenetrable oblivion, so that, even if the waves brought his body to the shore, his secret would remain unguessed.

Those who discovered this human wreckage, who carried it to the mortuary and thence to the cemetery, knew nothing of the man who had destroyed every clue that might give him away. The peasant who draped the corpse with this sinister remnant of its past had no idea of the name of the unfortunate flung up by the sea, over which he laid the protecting covering. No man knew, but there was Something that knew the secret of the dead. Something had come to clasp the lifeless body, to cover it with the crushing weight of its hidden sin. Led by an inexorable Nemesis, resolved to drag him back from the doors of escape, Something had come to imprison him with his crime even after forty years of suffering and expiation.

If in 1882 such an unbelievable coincidence could

have been foreseen, there would have seemed a hundred million chances to one against such a thing happening. But it did happen.

Many will say there is nothing symbolic here, that it was the purely accidental contact of two inanimate things, one bereft for ever of its spirit, the other never in all time possessed of spirit. The charitable will think that if there is a significance, it is that of pardon granted to the dead, *in articulo mortis*. For them this strip of stuff may be a token of final amnesty, enfolding, protecting, warming the corpse of the murderer, triply acquitted of his debt to society by thirty years in prison and the years of misery after that.

But there is perhaps another interpretation :

" Cause and effect are inseparable."

" Whatever precautions a criminal may have taken to dissociate himself morally and physically from an evil action he has committed, his action will take shape, return to him, and lead him back to the past he would forget, jealous even of his corpse. It will never be still until it has found him again, like the tunic of Hercules. He has cast it from him, but it comes to him again, and in the hour of his death it will be his shroud. To the end it proclaims the indissolubility of the chain that binds him to his past."

But we must leave philosophers and psychists to the endless meditation that such a theme must suggest.

Here is a translation of the death certificate issued by the civil office at Clemskerke:

"In the year 1922, on the 5th of July, was found at Clemskerke the body of an unknown man, apparently about sixty years old, bald, clean-shaven, with very few teeth, fairly stout, height 1 m. 80 cms. Clothes: black lacing shoes, black spats, brown socks, black striped trousers, black overcoat, black jacket and waistcoat, vest of brown wool with pockets, white shirt. Having in his possession a pocket-book containing 8.25 francs, a pair of brown leather gloves, a fountain-pen and a tube of vaseline."

This account was mistaken in two points: Léon Peltzer was not stout; the action of the sea must have swollen his body; and then, he was seventy-five years of age, not sixty. Evidently death had, as is often the case, softened and smoothed out the lines of his face, furrrowed with so much suffering.

But the other particulars left no doubt in the mind of M. B., to whom Léon had confided his resolution to make an end, and to make his death completely anonymous. He had not realised that M. B. junior, familiar with the smallest details of his dress, could not fail to recognise them in the list furnished by the certificate of death. Moreover, when Vander Stichelen, father and son, saw the portrait of Léon, published by the Press at the time, they both, without hesitation, recognised their mysterious suicide of the 5th July.

Léon Peltzer, however, is not legally dead. It was an "unknown man" who was quietly buried in the cemetery at Clemskerke, where he has been at rest now for five years.

Informed by M. B., I intimated in the Press the suicide of the ex-convict, and nothing would have been easier than for the authorities to verify the fact. They did not take the trouble. There has lain in a Flemish grave since the 6th of July, 1922, a dead man who is not dead in the eyes of the law, and who will, for the law, remain an unsolved riddle; he is one of the two men whose terrible fame once passed from mouth to mouth throughout the world as the perpetrators of one of the most extraordinary crimes of the century.

What a fatality is there in the symmetry of destiny! The ex-convict set at liberty became *the man who was somebody else*, and went down to the grave *as the man who was nobody*, who had no name even on the last wooden cross!

The news was a shock to me. I had for some time heard nothing of "Albert Preitelle." On his departure for Ceylon he had begged me—for he had to take precautions—only to write to him through the medium of his sister in Sarrebruck, but the war had come to cut off completely all correspondence between us. Myself an exile during the greater part of the four years, I returned to Brussels on the 16th November, 1918, eight months before Léon Peltzer arrived there from Ceylon.

Twice during the autumn of 1921 and the spring of 1922 I started at the sight of an old man passing by, in whom I almost seemed to recognise the features of "Albert Preitelle," but who was too absorbed in his reflections to notice me, and apparently too hurried to make it possible for me to accost him. But each time I concluded I had made a mistake, knowing that the outcast was forbidden to return to Belgium. It was, actually, for this reason that he shunned all company except those with whom he was obliged to come in contact, and of course M. B., who alone knew his true name and his tragic history.

It was M. B. who informed me of the suicide. At the same time he offered to furnish me with all the details of the life of Léon Peltzer since he had passed out of my sight. I have already related a good deal of what he told me, but there remain some furthur facts which throw fresh light on the tragedy of the rue de la Loi itself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

At the beginning of their acquaintance, M. B. and his brother had, like myself, scrupled to question their guest on the subject of the past, but either he considered he owed them his confidence, or he felt the need of unburdening his conscience to friends who would understand him, for more than once Léon himself took the initiative and let them see as much of the truth as he could, without violating the oath he had made to himself —that he had no doubt made to Armand—to keep for ever his brother's memory free from stain, by refraining from complete confession. The partial admissions he made in the course of long and frequent conversations with his benefactors can be briefly summarised as follows:

"The law was right in one important point. It was Armand who summoned me from America, but he had no evil intentions in doing so. My brother simply wanted me to help him in a plan for reconciliation with Bernays, and thus to win back to the presence of the adored wife. It was his fertile brain (he had a remarkable intellect) that devised and controlled the whole scheme by which I was to meet the lawyer at 159 rue de la Loi.

"His plan seemed to me as daring as it was dangerous. But you would need to understand Armand as I understood him. He was so madly in love that the most harebrained scheme would have seemed to him simple and obvious in order to attain an end which was dearer to him than life itself. You are thinking, no doubt: 'Then decidedly Murray was a myth!' Allow me to smile and leave it at that."

"But then, since Murray never existed, the Prosecution was not mistaken in anything?"

"Oh, yes, on the essential. I repeat, there was absolutely no idea of a trap or of murder when the rendezvous at 159 rue de la Loi was arranged. We knew that Bernays was fond of money and ambitious; it was our serious intention that he should take part in a large enterprise where, meeting Armand as a colleague, he would soon have become his friend once more, and my brother, having gained the confidence of the husband, would have become once more a guest in the home."

"But if there was no Murray behind the scenes, and no capital belonging to Murray, where did the money come from, so necessary to the preliminaries of your encounter with Bernays, if not from Armand?"

On this subject Léon would say nothing, but his silence was equivalent to an avowal, like the proud words which sometimes escaped him: "Money! in the Bernays case! It was to cost us a pretty penny before all was said and done, but how could it bring us money?"

Then came inevitably the question: "In what industrial enterprise could Armand meet Bernays if the famous Murray business was simply an invention?" "You forget," explained Léon, "that my brother had become *persona gratissima* to the greatest industrial and financial magnates in Liège, that the directorship of a big transport concern on the Meuse had just been offered him, and that, at his request, I had made inquiries about the Cockerill Company, the reply to which was found at my house in the rue de la Loi, and mentioned at the trial. There was the prospect of a big business which would have formed an effective link between Armand and Bernays, had it not been for my ill-timed and unforeseen murder.

"As a last point, there is one detail which was perhaps not sufficiently realised at the trial. At the time of my bankruptcy in Antwerp in 1872–73, Bernays did me a serious injustice, which I could never forget. The memory of this wrong suddenly flooded back over my consciousness when he recognised me on the 7th of January, 1882, menaced me and threatened to denounce me for having drawn him into a trap.

"Take account of all these elements, and you will understand, even though you cannot excuse, my rage and disappointment when, Bernays having unmasked me, I saw the whole scheme of reconciliation, so minutely prepared by my brother, crumble before my eyes. I did not kill with deliberate intent. I simply did not

know what I was doing, and the mortal shot was fired automatically at a moment when I had no control over my actions.

" Armand, then, had nothing to do with the plotting of a murder. It was simply because the Prosecution could find no proof of his previous complicity that it suited them to think and to declare that he had entered the house in rue de la Loi after the event, to adjust the the position of the corpse."

Then Léon unfolded a plan of the room, published at the time of the trial, showing on the carpet the alleged print of Armand's foot. He knelt down on the ground to prove to M. B. that the impression was exactly that of his own knee. On this point he was obstinate and almost indignant, swearing that Armand had never entered the house, and had never been accessory to, or even after, the crime.

From these oft-repeated statements of Léon Peltzer, the two brothers had deduced what probably everyone will deduce for themselves.

The law was mistaken in conjecturing that Armand had visited the house of the crime. As to the crime itself, it had indeed been premeditated and dictated by Armand. The story of Murray's company without Murray was obviously nonsense, and no one could believe that, in order to get in touch with the jealous husband by means of a business proposition, it was necessary, at great expense, to recall Léon from America, to disguise him

as Vaughan, and build up the terrific imbroglio which was to end in such calamity. Since Léon himself had thrown overboard the sham Murray and his sham company, the tragic interview at 159 rue de la Loi could have had no other aim but to get rid of Bernays through the agency of an undiscoverable Henry Vaughan, who would bear unpunished the unique responsibility for the crime, while Armand would gain the object of his adoration in marriage, offering her a hand unstained by blood, since Léon alone had shed it.

It is true that there remained for the eldest Peltzer the possibility of making use of his imposing Liège connection to enlist Bernays in the very real project of the Meuse transport, which he himself was to direct, and thus realise his dream of reconciliation without charging his conscience with a ghastly crime. But was it necessary for this to bring his discreditable brother post haste across the Atlantic, and concoct a story so complicated, tortuous and suspicious as the " Murray-Vaughan " fiction ? It would have been more than enough for Armand to say to his powerful friends in Liège : " Let me have M. Guillaume Bernays as my legal adviser, the most competent lawyer on all maritime and industrial matters, otherwise I shall not be willing to take up the responsibility of directorship, which you are good enough to offer me." His request would almost certainly have been granted at once.

The truth is, that no reconciliation with the husband

of the woman he idolised would have been enough for this idolater. There must be no husband to stand between him and the woman he loved so passionately to the exclusion of all else, but who refused to be his so long as she bore the name of another.

In trying to convince his benefactors of the contrary, Léon's only object was to save his brother from censure.

That the crime was premeditated has been established, not only by the trial of which a revision has never been claimed, but by proofs unconsciously furnished by Léon himself. If things had occurred as he declared, if Armand had not desired the death of Bernays, Léon could never have posed to himself and others as having killed through devotion to his brother, and thus have lent a kind of nobility to his crime. He would never have been able to forgive himself for having killed the Antwerp lawyer, and dragged his "guardian angel" into the morass of a horrible predicament. During his long imprisonment, with its solitude and silence, having no one to commune with but himself, he would inevitably have sunk under the load of his remorse. We have seen how the idea of suicide came to him many a time in prison, but not once did he attribute his desire for death to grief for having brought shame on an innocent brother, and when at last he put an end to his long life by throwing himself into the sea, it was simply because of his pride, and there was no idea of atoning for an unjust sentence passed on a brother he loved so well. He had constantly

sought to absolve Armand by his incredible version of the tragedy. When of his own free will he went to his death rather than become a burden to a stranger, he might have left behind him a memoir to re-affirm his brother's innocence, which, written at an hour of such tragic solemnity, would have carried great weight. His protectors had often asked him to commit to paper his final version of the terrible affair. He had always shrunk from such a task, and was never to accomplish it; no doubt because he felt he had reached the limit of devotion to his brother in denying verbally and definitely the truth which would have justified Armand's condemnation.

Only a psychological argument perhaps, but where will you find more decisive proof than in the soul of the man who lived for forty years after he had been condemned to death?

One other point of interest was furnished by Armand's Counsel, M. Edmond Picard, in his interesting pamphlet, *The Jury*, published after the death of the eldest brother, and directed in such a transparent fashion against that member of the Brussels jury (cursed by Armand) who had had the most influence on the decision of his colleagues.[1]

Edmond Picard imagines that this member of the jury came to his house and besought him to relieve his conscience and to say whether he had justly condemned a criminal or wrongfully brought punishment on an

[1] It appeared afterwards that the jury had been unanimous as to the guilt of Léon, but only decided by eight votes to four against Armand.

innocent man. The distinguished lawyer answers in the following words:

"Monsieur, what can I say to you? Is it likely that the wretch you have condemned would confess to his defenders that they can say nothing without forfeiting their professional honour? Our business is to deal with proofs. It is in the public interest not to condemn without proof. It is traditional in our profession never to affirm either guilt or innocence. In criminal matters we are sometimes the first to be deceived.

"I pity you with all my heart, Monsieur. The disclosure you expect from me is formidable. The accused has told me nothing, and I may add that during this long trial, and the time I spent with him in prison studying his case, never, day or night, in the discussions which often kept me with him until midnight, never, as a result of my countless questions and my efforts to discover everything and unravel the whole mystery, have I surprised a look, a word, an expression, any of the small details that so often betray guilt to us, which might clear up the enigma of that conscience."

If we strip this declaration of its pure rhetoric and of the reticence imposed by professional etiquette, there is left the significant fact that Armand's defender was never wholly convinced of his innocence, and that in pleading simply uncertainty, and the absence of proof, he was speaking in the only sincere and honourable way open to him. For Armand's Counsel the conscience of

the accused had hidden an unfathomable mystery. What, then, if not the mystery of guilt? Innocence does not shroud itself in secrecy, unless to shield another. This was, to a certain extent, the position of Léon; it could not be the case of Armand. He would, on the contrary, have minimised his brother's responsibility, and perhaps saved him from the supreme penalty had he acknowledged the truth of the accusation: "You were the brain that conceived and ordered; your brother was only the arm that obeyed." If he refrained, if his true rôle remained even to his Defenders a mystery to the end, there seems to be only one explanation possible. He hoped to benefit personally by the doubt to which his impenetrability gave rise, without greatly aggravating the case of his brother, who in any case was fatally compromised.

This, it would seem, must be the last comment on the subject of this strange drama of love, passion and death.

CHAPTER XXIX

At a distance of almost half a century, knowing all that ample records, written and oral, can reveal, we can consider the Peltzer Case, if with no less horror, at any rate with infinitely more pity.

Pity more profound than ever for the victim who had, like all mortals, his faults, but also distinguished qualities as a man, as a citizen and as a father, and therefore every right to live. Pity for his family, bereft so early of one they loved; pity for Mme. Bernays and her parents, victims of cruel prejudice and slander.

Pity even for the two murderers, and especially for the younger. He spoke truly when he painted his brother as a man unhinged by unsatisfied passion, maddened until he lost all idea of good and evil. Since the earliest times, crimes of passion have been viewed indulgently. And then there was the influence of Armand's race, terribly expressed by Schiller in the monstrous hero of *The Brigands:* "Everything is permissible for a man in order to reach his object, even to kill his father and his brother, and pass over their dead bodies!"

There are, however, two things that stand in Armand's favour. In spite of the strength of his passion, he never

let fall a word that was not charged with respect for the woman who inspired it, which did not render justice to her purity. A common criminal might have sought to excuse his crime by pleading a mutual infatuation. Then, his unassuaged passion, helped perhaps by remorse, had been of such violence that it had rapidly consumed him in his prison cell where, still so comparatively young, he atoned with his own life for the life he had taken. This unrestrained love then had been too strong for him. Once again human weakness was swept away before the whirlwind of passion.

As to the actual murderer, blinded by gratitude and by love for his brother, how can we refuse him an even greater measure of forgiveness? An almost passive instrument, even in his apparent activity, he yet took upon himself the onus of the crime in his generous desire to acquit his brother. He expiated to the full. Eagerly he left behind him his former self, and learned to look upon his past with loathing, to dream of and vainly to seek a future in which it might be his to repay.

It is a solemn thought to contemplate the absolutism of the judgments we pass on most human beings. No one is as great and no one is as base as he seems. The fathom-line, sounding the depths of men's characters, reveals in each one part demon and part angel. Who can tell what Orient pearl lies hidden in the most repulsive mass of mud?

For my part, a disinterested witness, I shall not

easily forget this fact, so paradoxical at first sight, but none the less so true. It was the "gallows bird" of 1872–82, who thirty years after, poor as he was, refused with horror all offers of charity, though he found his greatest joy in the giving of alms. And this "gallows bird," this murderer it was, who, in 1912, could not be trusted to look after the Singalese workers on a plantation because he had too kind a heart—*because he was infinitely too humane*.

APPENDIX

The fragments given here are extracts from three of Léon Peltzer's last letters, in which he informed his protector M. B. of his intention of suicide. M. B. tried in vain to dissuade him from his tragic resolution :

" Although a social outcast, I have my pride, which is perhaps even more sensitive because I have to defend myself doubly against any attack which may be made against it, for my conscience is my strength, and to it alone I owe obedience."

" Indeed it is not with a light heart that I have made up my mind on this point. I feel that I am driven to the inevitable. I have no money, and I will not prolong my useless existence by begging from those on whom I have no claim, so I disappear ! "

" I myself shall approach death very tranquilly, convinced that I have lived worthily the last years of my life, and that I leave it because I have become of no more use."